セブンス
9th
Yomu Mishima
三嶋与夢
illustration
ともぞ
9
ヒーロー文庫

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セブンス 7th 9

魔物の群れを相手にするのは、
戦斧（バトルアックス）を手にしたソフィアだった。

Yomu Mishima
三嶋与夢
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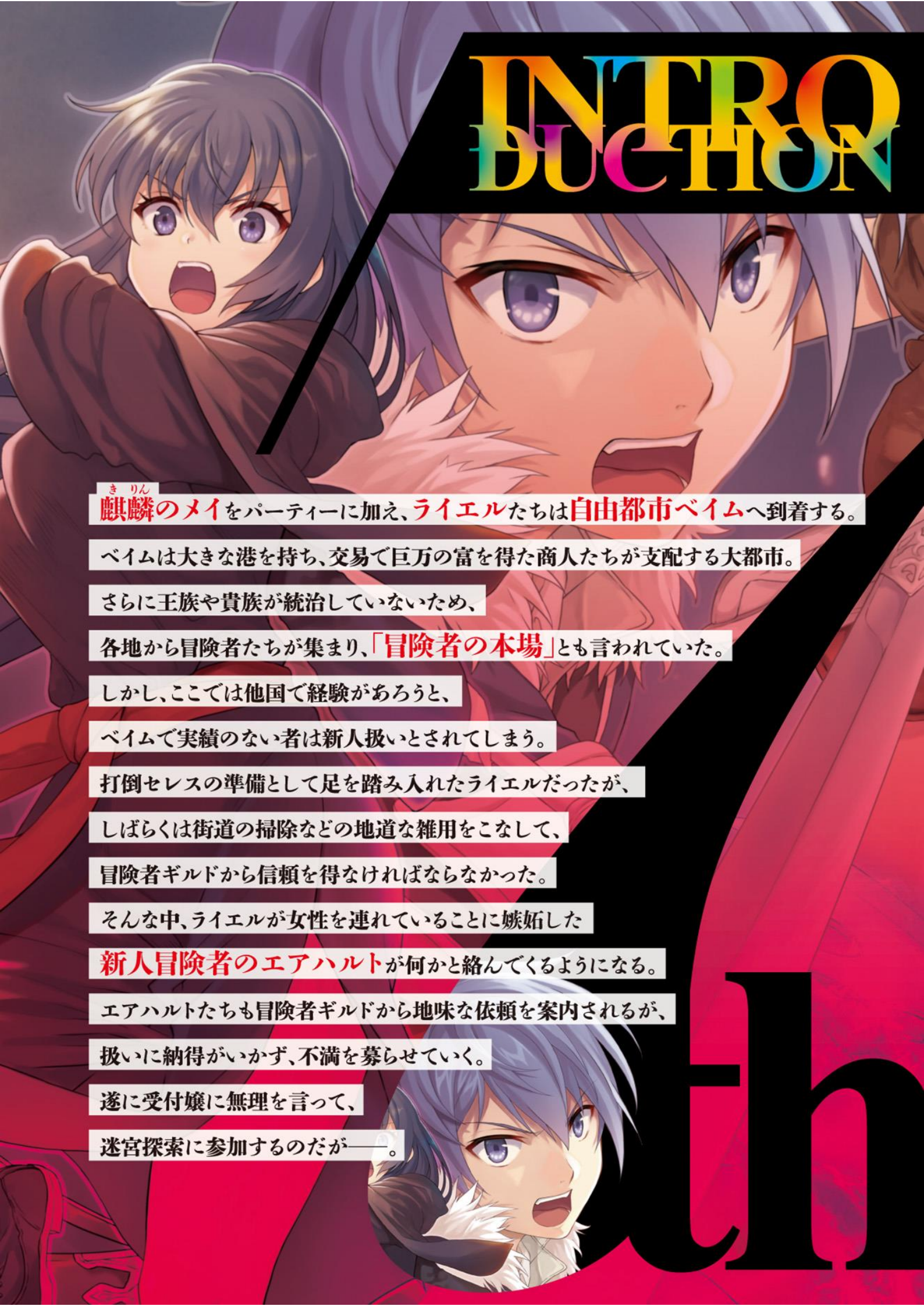
「ギルドの職員をしているわ」
物腰柔らかい美人職員のマリアンヌさん。

シャノンがエアハルトたちを
前に威張(いば)っていた。
「街道掃除舐(な)めんな！」

「何ですかそれは！」
顔を赤くして怒ったソフィアは
クラーラに詰め寄った。
大きな胸がクラーラの目の前に突き出される。

ライエルがソフィアに顔を近付け、そして呟くのだ。
「俺は嬉しいよ」
ソフィアは頭が沸騰するのではないかと思うほどに熱くなり、心臓の鼓動が嬉しく飛び跳ねる。
「わ、私も――です」



INTRODUCTION

麒麟（きりん）のメイをパーティーに加え、ライエルたちは自由都市ベイムへ到着する。

ベイムは大きな港を持ち、交易で巨万の富を得た商人たちが支配する大都市。

さらに王族や貴族が統治していないため、

各地から冒険者たちが集まり、「冒険者の本場」とも言われていた。

しかし、ここでは他国で経験があろうと、

ベイムで実績のない者は新人扱いとされてしまう。

打倒セレスの準備として足を踏み入れたライエルだったが、

しばらくは街道の掃除などの地道な雑用をこなして、

冒険者ギルドから信頼を得なければならなかった。

そんな中、ライエルが女性を連れていることに嫉妬した

新人冒険者のエアハルトが何かと絡んでくるようになる。

エアハルトたちも冒険者ギルドから地味な依頼を案内されるが、

扱いに納得がいかず、不満を募らせていく。

遂に受付嬢に無理を言って、

迷宮探索に参加するのだが――。

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歴代当主アーツ紹介

初代

バジル・ウォルト

一段階目 フルオーバー

身体能力の強化。

二段階目 リミットバースト

限界を超えた力を引き出し、
体にかかる負担は無視。

三段階目 フルバースト

体から青い炎を出し、
身体能力を倍に引き上げる。

二代目

クラッセル・ウォルト

一段階目 オール

他者にアーツを使用する事が出来る。
副次的な効果で自分を中心に球体状の範囲を
五感とは別に認識できる。

二段階目 フィールド

集団にアーツを同時に使用可能。
オールよりも範囲が更に広がっている。

三段階目 セレクト

フィールドよりも更に広範囲に能力を使用可能。
敵味方を判断し、狙いを付けることができる。

三代目

スレイ・ウォルト

一段階目 マインド

相手の精神へ干渉する。

二段階目 コントロール

相手を意のままに操る。

三段階目 ???

四代目

マークス・ウォルト

一段階目 スピード

移動速度の安定的な向上。

二段階目 アップダウン

自分の移動速度を向上させつつ、
敵の移動速度を低下させる。

三段階目 ???

五代目

フレドリクス・ウォルト

一段階目 マップ

周辺の地図を頭の中で
鮮明に見ることが出来る。

二段階目 ディメンション

立体的な周囲の地図を、
頭の中で鮮明に見ることが出来る。

三段階目 ???

六代目

ファインズ・ウォルト

一段階目 サーチ

周辺の敵味方の判別や、
トラップなどの位置を確認できる。

二段階目 スペック

敵味方、そしてトラップの
より詳しい情報の入手。

三段階目 ???

七代目

ブロード・ウォルト

一段階目 ボックス

生物以外の収納を可能とする
特別な空間を操る。

二段階目 ワープ

短距離の瞬間移動。

三段階目 ???

ライエル・ウォルト

一段階目 エクスペリエンス

より多くの経験を得て
“成長”を早める。

二段階目 コネクション

粘膜的な接触をした相手との間にラインを作り、
感覚情報とライエルの持つアーツを共有できる。

三段階目 ???

Prologue

Part 1

.

—Spring had come to Centralle(セントラル), capital of the Bahnseim(バンセイム) Kingdom.

The scenery of the city was just like that of spring. It's filled with a crowd that was even more energetic than it was in winter.

At the palace of that Bahnseim Kingdom, there was a single girl who was sitting on the throne with an insolent attitude.

Her name was Celes Walt(セレス・ウォルト).

Her fingertips toyed with her slightly curly and long blonde hair. She was sitting with her legs crossed and a bored look on her face.

Celes, the crown princess, originally wouldn't be allowed to sit on the throne.

She'd originally be given the capital punishment for this violation, but there wasn't even a single person in this palace who would reproach her.

She had pale skin and a symmetrical face. Despite her young age, she was a beauty.

Rather than adorable, it would be better to call her beautiful—one could feel a bewitching quality from her appearance.

She was a girl so beautiful that it seemed like she were emitting light from her body. Her lustrous and pretty lips moved.

「—It seems you allowed that piece of trash to escape, and on top of that you got caught in a trap. Lionel, I had expected something from you, but this really is a let-down.」

In front of Celes there was a young man kneeling down on one knee with his head bowed.

The blue haired and blue eyed young man looked just like that girl's biological big brother.

His name was Lionel Walt(リオネル・ウォルト).

He was the heir of the capital noble Walt House. If these two's family trees were traced back, it would become clear that they shared the same ancestor.

Right now he was trembling, with sweat pouring off of him like a waterfall. He looked like he was about to press his forehead down to the ground and grovel any second now.

「M-my greatest apologies! Lyle—that guy trapped me!」

Lyle—Lyle Walt(ライエル・ウォルト) was Celes's biological brother.

He was a man who was the eldest son of the feudal lord Walt House.

Celes made an annoyed face.

「I told you to not make any moves on him, didn't I? And yet you ignored my words and chased after that trash, and were defeated. I wonder if you have the proper awareness for the commander of the special royal guard?」

Lionel was the commander of Celes's special royal guard.

Although he didn't have any troops yet. After all, he was the only member of the special royal guard, so it was natural for him to be treated as the "commanding officer".

Lionel's house, the capital noble Walt House, was once a noble house with the rank of lower seventh, which allowed them to pass down their title to their descendants.

But, the rank of lower seventh was the lowest position possible within the noble rank.

Then, Lionel had caught the eye of Celes and he obtained the title of baron and even a position in the special royal guard.

What Lionel feared was offending Celes.

「I swear that I will catch that guy without fail!」

Celes showed an exasperated face seeing Lionel saying such a thing. Even so, she was unbearably pleased in her heart.

(This guy is so stupid. Even though I told him not to make any moves, he prioritized his personal grudge and tried to catch that piece of garbage. But—it's fine for you to be like this.)

For Celes, there wasn't any problem at all, even if Lionel was incompetent.

Rather, it was exactly because he was incompetent that there was meaning in placing him by her side.

—A man with the spitting image of her biological brother.

It was a nice way to kill time for Celes, exposing this guys incompetence—it was just a sideshow for her.

The title of the commander of special royal guard that she granted him was also just a game for her.

「Even so, I can't believe that he got himself thrown in prison while chasing Lyle. This guy really is an idiot. It's pretty funny though, so I'll forgive him.」

If this man was her proper subordinate, Celes absolutely wouldn't forgive him.

She would immediately execute him.

But, Celes forgave Lionel.

「I told you to not chase after him.」

Lionel's gaze wandered around when Celes said that.

「B-but—」

It seemed he had a reason for chasing after Lyle.

(Is he still planning to do something? Well, I'll keep that in reserve for my future entertainment.)

Celes was having fun inside her heart seeing Lionel's conduct that was just too hopeless. Then a young man who was the member of her true royal guard reached out for the handle of his sword.

「Are you planning to go against Celes-sama's order?」

The one who threatened Lionel with a low voice was a tall young man in his early twenties.

He had long and straight brown hair.

He had green eyes with a sharp look.

The name of this serious looking young knight was Baldoir Randbergh(バルドア・ランドバーグ).

Randbergh House was a family of knights that had served the Walt House for generations. Baldoir was the heir of its main house.

Right now he was Celes's personal bodyguard.

He was a really capable knight and Celes's favorite.

He was going to cut down the incompetent Lionel in this place.

Celes's fun would decrease if Lionel was killed here, so she stopped him with her hand.

「Baldoir, take your hand off your sword.」

「Is that alright? This person has misused Celes-sama's authority and did as he pleased. It will only harm Celes-sama later if we keep him alive.」

It was a reply that was just like the serious Baldoir.

Celes smiled.

「I said that I forgive him.」

「—Pardon my rudeness.」

Baldoir let go of his sword when Celes said that.

The trembling Lionel stroked his chest because he didn't get killed.

Celes watched him as she stood up from the throne and walked toward the window.

Sunlight was shining in from the large window.

「Lionel, leave that piece of trash alone for a while.」

When Celes said that, Lionel turned toward Celes and fell on his knees with his body leaning forward.

「Celes-sama, that guy is dangerous! We should capture him immediately!」

Lionel was strongly conscious towards Lyle because they both possessed the same family name Walt—but that wasn't all.

It was also because the woman he fell in love with was together with Lyle.

Celes also knew about that.

「Lionel, I wish that you won't disappoint me further than this.」

Celes turned her back on Lionel so that her face couldn't be seen from where he was.

Her tone was completely calm and rebuking, but her expression was smiling.

This extremely incompetent young man was a very nice way to kill time for her.

But, right now she was in the middle of thinking of a new way to have fun.

She couldn't spend all her time caring about only Lionel.

「There are nobles who are in opposition toward my rise as the crown princess. Someone has to be dispatched to subjugate them. Are you, my special royal guard going to leave my side at this important time?」

「N-no, that's—」

Baldoir and the other knights who were Celes' true royal guards frowned seeing Lionel's ambiguous attitude.

Lionel didn't notice the irritation of the royal guards because of how dense he was.

That incompetence was extremely funny for Celes.

(I'm really glad that I picked you up at that time.)

「We're going to crush the defiant nobles within the country. I will send an army from the kingdom for that. Of course, I'll also ask Otou-sama to move out.」

The army of the Bahnseim Kingdom and the army of feudal lord noble Walt House were preparing to fight the defiant nobles within the country.

It was nothing more than a game for Celes.

She looked at the cane that was storing her rapier.

A yellow jewel was embedded on its tip. It was emitting a faint mysterious light.

Celes watched the jewel while whispering in a volume that couldn't be heard by anyone.

「—Yes, I know. From now on, it'll be fun.」

Celes talked to the jewel and then she smiled at the townscape of the royal capital that was visible from the large window.

A voice that could only be heard by Celes came from the yellow Jewel.

『My cute Celes. It'll be soon. Soon—this land will be dyed with blood once more.』

The woman's voice sounded very pleasant, but at the same time it also sounded somewhat bewitching.

Celes replied toward the captivating whisper.

「I'm really looking forward to it—Agrissa(アグリッサ).」

It was the name of the woman who was once called the country toppling beauty that changed the continent into hell all by herself.

『It's good that you're also looking forward to it. But more importantly, your face is breaking into a grin you know?』

「Oh, I'm sorry. I've become the crown princess, so I have to keep appearances up slightly.」

『Indeed. Well, soon there won't be any need to keep up appearances. Be patient until then.』

Celess's face that was reflected on the glass window was sporting a hideous smile—.

.

The free city Beim(ベイム).

It was a metropolis that possessed a large harbor, ruled by merchants who obtained immense wealth from trade with other countries.

At the same time, it was also called the home of adventurers.

The reason there were many adventurers here is because this city is just that convenient for them.

Beim wasn't ruled by royalty or nobles. The tax that was applied to the adventurers was shockingly small.

Work flowed in here one after another.

And the greatest attraction for the adventurers was the dungeon that existed in Beim.

Beim's dungeon was predicted to have more than one hundred underground floors. It was an attractive way to earn money for the adventurers.

It was easy to encounter monsters inside a dungeon, so they could defeat a lot of them.

Then they would collect the magic stone and parts of the monster's body to be sold after they got out of the dungeon.

Adventurers were also universally received in Beim. The adventurer guild here was famed for its support to adventurers that was far warmer compared to other adventurer guilds.

Because of that, this city was called the metropolis of merchants and adventurers.

That Beim was a metropolis that was surrounded by high walls—and that wasn't all.

「So this is the freedom city Beim—it's even more amazing than Centralle.」

I looked up at the tall buildings with admiration. I must have looked like a country bumpkin who came here from the countryside.

Sometimes the passing by residents of Beim were chuckling at me.

There were also people who looked at me condescendingly among them.

But, I—Lyle Walt ignored those eyes and admired this metropolis called Beim.

The streets inside the city were neatly paved with stone.

The streets were wide and clean.

The number of people and carriages coming and going was also many.

No, it was too many.

The population density here also seemed high.

And then, above all else, the buildings were all tall.

The styles of the buildings were varied, with some looking a bit unorganized, but all of the buildings on the main street were splendid and extravagant

I had seen several cities until now, but none of them was as splendid as Beim.

The voice of the Third came from the blue Jewel hanging from my neck while I was looking around in wonder.

It seemed he was surprised.

『What's this place? This surpassed my imagination.』

It seemed that the size of Beim's scale, as well as its splendor, had surprised him.

The Fourth was also similarly surprised, but what he spoke of was from the financial aspect.

『Just how much money are they using in order to maintain all of this?』

From the Fourth's perspective, all of this must be more extravagant than necessary.

After all, the whole city looked sparkling.

It wasn’t like gold and silver were used abundantly, but nothing that entered my eyes looked cheap.

I heard that because there was no royalty or nobles in Beim,the major merchants were the ones who were paying for the maintenance of the public areas like the streets and such.

That might be why the atmosphere here was different from other cities.

The Fifth who was normally calm sounded somewhat suspicious.

『Just what have they done so that the city could be this developed?』

It seemed he wanted to say something about the development level of Beim.

But the Sixth was laughing loudly.

『The commerce here is profitable after all. Even so, it’s amazing that the city can develop this far without even any king or nobles.』

It was an unbelievable story for me.

The Seventh was also feeling suspicious, but it also felt like he was scheming something.

『This surpassed what I heard. Even so, if it’s developed to this degree—we can also expect much from it.』

The Third agreed with that opinion, but he also spoke that it was necessary to understand this city called Beim correctly.

『Seems so. But, this surpassed our expectations. If we don’t proceed carefully, we might get the rug pulled out from under our feet.』

When I thought that I also had to focus myself, Monica(モニカ) called out to me.

「Chicken dickwad. Enough running from reality, please do something about that.」

—The one who called me chicken dickwad was Monica, who tied her blonde hair into twintails and wears a red maid uniform.

Even though she acted like this, she was a machine called automata that was a legacy of the ancient people. But, she was also a faulty product that called me, her master, a chicken dickwad.

That Monica was pointing in a direction where there were young men who acted even more like country bumpkins than me.

「So this is Beim!」

「We're going to live here from now on!」

「Oi, that woman just now was super pretty!」

The noisy young men were dressed in slightly dirty shirts and trousers that were soaked with mud.

Rusty knives were hanging on their waist.

They were carrying large baggage looking completely like someone who came from the sticks—they were laughed at by the people around.

These young men seemed to take those people's laughter as friendly smiles and responded by waving their hands.

They were actually getting made fun of, but they showed no sign of noticing.

It was painful watching it.

「I wonder if I'm also looking like that from the surrounding's perspective?」

When I muttered that anxiously, Novem Forxuz(ノウェム・フォクスズ) hurriedly followed up for me.

She was a girl who accompanied me by herself when I was driven out by my family.

She was also my fiancée in the past.

Her trademark was her light brown hair that was tied into a side ponytail. She was always thinking of me first.

「It's alright. Lyle-sama's appearance is immaculate, so there is no problem at all. Besides, the stronghold of Lyle-sama's family, the Walt House, is also a large city. There is nothing about Lyle-sama that can be made fun of.」

「No, you can't guess where a person came from just by looking at their face right? The people around must be thinking that I'm the same as those guys.」

「It's alright!」

「I-I see.」

「Yes! After all, Lyle-sama is the legitimate heir of Walt House who inherited their noble blood. Your refinement cannot be compared to any other man.」

Novem wouldn't back down, so I was the one who backed down.

But it was a mistake to say that I had refinement because I had the blood of Walt House flowing in me.

After all, the ancestor of the feudal lord noble Walt House, the first head Basil Walt(バジル・ウォルト), was a barbarian as far removed as possible from the word “refinement”.

If we put a lot of stock in blood, then it would have meant that I who inherited the blood of the First was far away from being refined.

While I was talking with Novem, there was a woman who put her chin on my shoulder.

It was Miranda Circry(ミランダ・サークライ) who had light green hair and eyes, and acted like the big sister among my comrades.

「It’s not just the blood that decides everything there is to a human. Lyle is amazing is because of the results of his own effort, don’t you think so?」

Miranda often intentionally made a remark that opposed Novem.

Novem who was aware of that talked back.

「Yes, I understand that. But, Lyle-sama who inherited the blood of Walt House and is also working hard on top of that has nothing to be ashamed of at all.」

I was happy to be recognized, but it made me feel really embarrassed to be told such a thing.

A country bumpkin was being noisy at the side while the two were praising me and confronting each other.

「Everyone look! There is a stupidly huge fountain there!」

Shannon Circry(シャノン・サークライ) pointed at a fountain with her yellow eyes sparkling.

She had been in high spirits ever since we arrived at Beim.

Her difference from the country bumpkin young men was that the surroundings were smiling warmly when it was Shanon acting excited like that.

To them it looked like she was a little child getting excited.

Sophia Rowley(ソフィア・ラウリ) who had black hair and wore a robe tried to calm down Shannon in a panic.

「Shannon-san, please be quiet. Everyone is looking here.」

Shannon ignored Sophia and looked around.

「All the buildings are so big. The street is also wide, they look pretty for some reason.」

It was just as Shannon said.

The townscape of Beim had wide streets with big buildings lined up neatly.

It felt like we had become midgets here.

The red haired Aria Lockwarde(アリア・ロックウォード) was carrying several pieces of luggage on her shoulders while looking around.

She was on her guard against thieves and the like.

「There are a lot of people so let’s move quickly. Even so, there really are so many people.」

The walking speed of the people around us, and then the running speed of the carriages were fast.

The atmosphere felt really busy.

It felt like we would be yelled at about being in the way if we kept staying here, so we started moving together with our luggage.

The country bumpkin young men were also following us when we started moving.

The qilin May(メイ) pulled at my clothes to let me know.

「Lyle, those boys are also following us.」

Originally she was a sacred beast that was called a qilin, but right now she was taking the form of a girl.

Her clothes exposed a bit—no, a lot of her skin and gathered attention from the surroundings.

I turned around and directed my gaze to the leader of those young men, Erhart Baumann(エアハルト・バウマン).

His attire was extremely—unique.

He had disheveled black hair and a lean body, but with firm muscles and tanned skin.

There was nothing wrong with him until that far, but the problem was his attire.

Even though he was only wearing a tank top on his upper body, his lower body was wearing armor like a loin guard and leg guards.

Even though his upper body's vital spots were completely exposed, his lower body was wearing a complete set of armor.

And then he was carrying a rusty greatsword with quality that looked poor on his back. He called the sword the demon sword Gram.

It seemed that the person himself was thinking that this getup was the best for him. He was walking with a proud look about his own appearance.

The elf girl who loved stories, Eva(エヴァ), was watching him.

She was tidying up her disordered hair from the long travel with an interested look.

She stared fixedly at Erhart—then she shook her head.

「He is no good. As I thought, Lyle is the main character of my story. I thought that perhaps he could be a hero in the making, but he really just doesn't click.」

When Eva said that, Clara Bulmer(クラーラ・ブルマー) who had a bad relationship with Eva snapped at her.

She had a small build, blue hair, and red eyes, but it was her artificial left hand that attracted the most attention.

「I don't think that you have the capability to tell heroes apart, though.」

Eva got angry being told that and drew near to Clara.

「You got quite a mouth on you, you bonehead!」

「Better to be a bonehead than a liar.」

The two started to quarrel, but they were always like this so I ignored them.

My other companions were only making a face that said 「Again?」.

I called out to Erhart.

「So. Why are you guys following us?」

When I asked that question, Erhart and others averted their gaze from me and replied.

「Haa? Why are you thinking that we're walking behind you huh? It's just you guys who are walking in front of us.」

They had been following behind us all the way here from outside Beim.

It was the Third who had deciphered their intention.

『Looks like they are excited to finally arrive in a big city, but they don't actually know what to do now that they're here. In the first place, it doesn't look like they have made any plans for here on.』

As expected, there was no way they were that thoughtless.

The Third noticed my disbelief and laughed lightheartedly.

Surely this was him being his usual flighty self, no doubt about it.

『Eh, could it be you don't believe me? Lyle really is still too green.』

We had arrived at Beim, so I guess we should register as adventurers here first?

Or perhaps we should look for an inn before that?

I told Erhart and his friends about our destination.

「Then, we'll head to the adventurer guild.」

Beim's adventurer guild was really big, fitting for the city that was called the home of adventurers.

The large building that was located at the center of Beim was the adventurer guild.

—That was what I heard anyway.

Erhart and others followed when we started walking toward the adventurer guild.

「That’’s right! The adventurer guild. We’re going to register there first!」

I looked back in surprise.

Then the young men looked at each other in understanding.

「It’ll be my first time going to the adventurer guild.」

「Where’s it located?」

「So we’re going to be adventurers with this, huh~」

It seemed they only thought about going to the adventurer guild for the first time after Erhart mentioned it.

Were they seriously thinking about their future?

The Third’s laughter came from the Jewel.

『Look! They weren’t thinking at all. This is just how the typical youths are.』

The Fifth corrected that opinion of the Third.

『It’s just that these guys are dumber than the average person.』

Aria also turned her gaze while I was looking at the young men in surprise.

「They feel really haphazard. Still, are they planning to keep following us like this?」

Sophia's expression clouded.

「I'm worried that they'll cause trouble for the people around them. They are strangers, but it'll be troublesome if they are thought of as our companions.」

The young men had just left their birthplace and arrived in the big city, and yet they were more thoughtless than I imagined.

Even though they were strangers, this made me worried about whether they would really be alright.

「A-anyway, let's go until the guild. After that they surely won't follow around us anymore.」

Aria shrugged and laughed.

「I wonder about that. They might keep following us even after that.」

As expected that wouldn't happen—or so I wanted to believe.

We arrived at Beim's adventurer guild.

It was so big that all the guilds we had seen before this looked small compared to it.

In the first place, there were four doors prepared just for the entrance.

We entered from the entrance that had the words 「West Entrance」 written and searched for the counter.

The building itself was built in the shape of a cylinder. It looked like the inside was divided crosswise from the center.

There were a lot of people coming and going.

There weren't only adventurers here, but also a lot of merchants and civilians.

The inside's structure was also really pretty and functional.

The decorations weren't overdoing it but wouldn't make one bored watching them. But, the counter caught my attention even more.

The long counter that was at the back of the area had a lot of staff lined up and talking with the adventurers.

The adventurers were making several lines waiting for their turn to come. There were also adventurers sitting on the sofa that was put near the wall.

May was watching all of those with admiration.

「I had thought that this is a big building, but I'm still amazed that there is this many people inside. Human really like being stuffed inside a box.」

That impression was really just like May, who wasn't a human, I guess?

While I was thinking of where I should line up at, Novem pointed at the counter that was near the entrance instead of at the back of the area.

「Lyle-sama, it seems that place is the counter for asking information.」

She did well spotting it.

We headed to the information counter, but—Erhart and his friends cut in front of us.

「Uh oh, we'll be the first one!」

The staff at the counter were looking at us, so I gestured that it was alright Erhart to go first.

The staff nodded slightly and replied to Erhart and his friends.

The staff's age was around the mid-twenties, I guess?

「What can I help you with today?」

Erhart leaned on the counter with his elbows in order to talk with the staff. He looked a bit impatient.

「Aa~, err. We want to become adventurers! And then we're going to complete quests like mad and become the number one adventurers in a flash—」

The staff cut off his story resolutely while he was passionately reciting his dream.

「Understood. Adventurer registration is it? In that case please go to the southern side. The registration of rookie adventurers is done there.」

The inside of the guild was divided into four. The staff explained how to head to the southern counter, but Erhart hit the counter and started complaining.

「Just do it here. You can do at least that much right? We're busy.」

He was saying he was busy even though it was doubtful that they even had any plans on what to do after this?

The staff looked like he was also used to this type of visitor.

「It’s the rule that the registration can only be done at the southern counter. It’s pointless no matter how much you complain here. ―Next group please.」

The staff ignored Erhart and his friends and called out to us.

It was awkward, but we couldn’t keep going along with Erhart’s group forever.

As the leader, I talked with the staff.

「We have registered as adventurers, but this is our first time in Beim.」

The staff gave us an explanation that he must have repeated many times until now.

「Then you must have your guild card with you. Please go to the south counter in that case. Adventurers who come from other place also have to receive a short course.」

It seemed that even registered adventurers had to receive a short course in Beim.

「So everyone is treated the same regardless of their experience?」

「It’s because this place has a lot of differences from adventurer guilds of other places.」

It would be pointless even if I grumbled here, so we immediately headed toward the south counter.

Then Erhart’s group that was watching us was also following behind.

This, could it be―they’re going to follow us till the end?

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Part 2

Now then, about the adventurer registration and short course—there wasn't anything particularly new from them.

The short course was a simple explanation about the guild.

It was explained that the south reception desk was often used by rookies and average adventurers.

Beim's adventurer guild was divided into four, east, west, south, and north.

The south side was the general receptionist.

The north side was the receptionist for dungeon related things.

The west side seemed to be a bit unique. It was the place that handled mercenary related quests.

And then the east side was the receptionist for things related to the sea—like guarding a ship, etc. That side was handling naval-based quests.

After receiving the explanation, we handed our guild card and took care of the procedures.

A guild card was a set of two metallic cards. When the owner died, the name that was written on the metallic card would be scratched off. The rule was that one card was carried by the owner who had their name engraved on the cards, while the other card was entrusted to the guild.

And then, we finished listening to all the explanations without problem but—.

「Who can accept something like that!」

—Erhart was making a ruckus.

He complained after the short course was over and they received the next explanation separately.

The other rookies and adventurers who came from other places were going back, but Erhart's group was complaining so we were left behind.

「Why can't we receive quests huh!? In addition we also can't enter into the dungeon, this isn't like what we heard!」

Beim's adventurer guild at first explained to the rookies and us adventurers who came from other places that our achievement before this wouldn't be taken into consideration.

It didn't matter how much achievement we had in other places, we would be treated as rookies in Beim. That was the way the adventurer guild of Beim did thing here.

A male staff around thirty years old was talking to Erhart.

「That's why, the rookies still cannot be trusted. The guild can't assign quests to such people and also doesn't wish them to challenge the dungeon. Please obediently start from accomplishing quests like odd jobs.」

「If it's us then we'll be able to accomplish any kind of request, we'll also bring back a mountain of treasure from the dungeon! There isn't any need for us to do odd jobs!」

The staff was looking troubled at Erhart's group that was full of spirit and nothing else.

A woman came at that timing.

Her age seemed to be in the early twenties. She had long and silky blonde hair, yellow eyes—her drooping eyes were giving her a gentle atmosphere.

Her distinctive trait was her beautiful face and her nice body—her adventurer guild uniform that was the same as the uniform the other female staff wore, was remodeled to emphasize her breasts .

It became a uniform that made her large breasts stand out.

Erhart and his friends were pouring their gazes on those large breasts.

It seemed the woman came here because she heard the commotion.

「Is something the matter?」

The male staff looked at Erhart's group and sighed at how their gazes were fixed at the woman's breasts.

「Marianne(マリアンヌ)-san, it seems they're feeling humiliated because they're treated as rookies.」

「My, is that so?」

The beauty with a gentle atmosphere was showing surprise, but Erhart's group was quiet unlike what they had been like.

They were acting like gentlemen, perhaps because they were in front of a beauty.

「Even though I look like this, I have three Arts. I've mastered them. It's just wrong to make someone like me do odd jobs right?」

Three Arts? It must be some kind of mistake.

He also didn't look like he had any magic tool that could become a substitute for Arts.

Or perhaps he was meaning to say that he could use his Arts until the third stage?

Was he understanding it wrongly or perhaps he didn't know anything about that from the start—it looked like he didn't know anything about the common sense of adventurers.

The beautiful staff gave some praise as to not offend the feelings of Erhart's group.

「That's amazing! Only few people can manifest their Arts until the third stage. You must be really strong.」

「Y-yeah! That's why, you can give us any kind of quest without worry. Give us quests that can make us stand out as adventurer.」

I'm amazing so treat me like a pro—this guy was really willful.

The beautiful staff was listening to Erhart talking with a smile, but then she made a sad face after Erhart finished boasting.

「I'm really sorry. It's the rule so even we can't do anything. But, let's see—in Beim there is a "proficiency test" for the sake of measuring someone's real strength. It's a test in order to see the strength of the people who come from other places, how about you try participating in it if you are that confident?」

The male staff who had been keeping quiet while listening to the talk until now opened his eyes wide in shock and started to look panicked.

「N-no, that's—」

The beautiful staff said 「Please leave this to me」 and held back the male staff.

At that time, the beautiful staff—glanced at our way.

She wanted her words to be heard not by Erhart's group alone, but also by us.

Measuring the strength of adventurers who came from other places.

—This was a talk that was intended toward us huh.

「The test is simple. The test this time is to challenge the dungeon that is located in Beim. To be more accurate, you will have to support the adventurers who receive the guild's quest and challenge the dungeon. If your strength is recognized there, then Beim will recognize you as a fully fledged adventurer.

The eyes of Erhart's group shined in expectation after they heard that.

「What. That's simple. Just leave it to us. We're going to make the guild acknowledge us as professionals, yeah! P-putting that aside, what is your name?」

Erhart asked the beautiful staff's name shyly. It didn't look like he understood the meaning of challenging a dungeon.

A cold voice that was directed toward the beautiful staff came from inside the Jewel.

『Could this be an attempt to get rid of a nuisance? Something like sending ignorant and troublesome youths into the dungeon to dispose them?』

The other ancestors were also agreeing with that opinion of the Fourth.

But, none of them expressed any pity or sympathy.

Those young men were choosing their own path. There wasn't any need for us to persuade them and make them give up.

The beautiful staff put her hand on her chest and smiled.

「I'm sorry for the late introduction. I am—Marianne. A staff member of this guild.」

The beautiful staff with gentle manner, Marianne-san.

But the reaction of the ancestors was cold.

The Fifth didn't sound interested, even so I got the feeling that he was feeling slightly irritated.

『This woman is sending ignorant youngsters to their death with a smile like that. Well, it's not our business though.』

Erhart and his friends would surely die if they challenged a dungeon when they didn't have any decent equipment like that.

Shannon was looking around in a dither.

「H-hey, aren't we going to stop them?」

It seemed that Shannon knew that Erhart's group was in danger and wanted to stop them.

But, Miranda-san was expressionless.

「It's what they chose for themselves. Besides, I don't want to look after them.」

Shannon asked for help from me with her gaze, but I had the same opinion so I pretended not to notice.

Erhart's group asked Marianne-san.

「And, when is it that this test will start?」

「It'll be two weeks later. I think the test will last for around a month.」

Erhart's group was surprised hearing the words one month.

「O-one month!? It will take that long!?」

「It'll be a large scale expedition. The objective of the adventurers who entered the test will be helping out with that expedition. It's fine! All of you are strong, right?」

「O-ou! We'll finish that kind of test in a flash!」

Marianne-san clapped and instigated Erhart's group.

And then she sent her gaze to us.

「Now then, how about you adventurers over there? From what I see your party is quite experienced, isn't that right?」

Did she judge that we were experienced as adventurers after seeing our appearance?

Then she should also know that Erhart's group was just a group of amateurs.

This person—felt a bit dangerous.

I tightly grasped the Jewel.

Then the ancestors gave me advice as usual—or not.

『Oh, you're already relying on us? How about you try thinking by yourself, Lyle.』

The Third pushed me away even though he knew what I wanted to ask.

But, the Fourth followed-up for him.

『Lyle, it's not like the Third is pushing you away. Lyle should start thinking and acting by yourself soon.』

It seemed the Fifth also held the same opinion.

『It's fine even if you accept the test or not. Your objective isn't to become a first rate adventurer. It's to defeat Celes.』

The Sixth was amused.

『I'm also interested in what you're going to do to achieve your objective. Do whatever you like.』

The Seventh told me to decide by myself.

『Now, Lyle—what are you going to do if it's you?』

I tightly grasped the Jewel once before letting it go and smiling at Marianne-san.

「I'll pass.」

Chapter 98 – Plain Adventurer

I decided not to take the proficiency test that was being held by Beim's adventurer guild. Marianne-san looked surprised once she heard that.

「—Your party is quite strong, isn't it? Are you really not going to take the test? You'll be treated like rookies for at least three months if you don't.」

We had heard the explanation about that in the short course.

「There's no problem. We'll spend these three months quietly.」

My party members didn't complain even after they heard my decision. Besides Shanon, that is.

「Haa? Why aren't you accepting? We'll be recognized by the guild right away if you accept the test.」

Miranda-san quickly used her hand to block Shannon's mouth.

「Just be quiet, Shannon.」

Marianne-san was about to speak some more, but there was another person who interrupted us.

It was Erhart.

「What? Did you get cold feet when it comes to taking the test?」

He placed his hands inside his trouser's pockets and walked up to me with a confident swagger, bringing his face right up to me.

「There's no problem with not taking the test, that's all.」

It seemed Erhart decided in his mind that I was a coward when he heard that.

「Keh! You won't accept my challenge, and you also won't take the test. It's strange that a weakling like you has this many beauties following you around. You girls, are you seriously planning on following this guy? We're far more reliable than him.」

Erhart and his friends were making that kind of appeal, but Novem shook her head at them.

「Lyle-sama isn't a weakling. He really is reliable.」

Monica was sending me glances as she praised me.

「Chicken dickwad is certainly unreliable, but he is still my master. It's impossible for me to serve any other person. Kyaa~, I'm really a laudable maid!」

Clara was reading her book because she had nothing to do, but she closed it and put it back into her bag since we were getting too noisy.

「I don't know what you're expecting from us, but please pay us no mind.」

Eva made fun of Clara.

「You really don't understand the inner workings of the heart. They're showing off in front of cute girls right now. —But, be careful. You'll only look silly if you show off too much, okay?」

Erhart's cheeks were twitching when Eva said that to him.

His hand was moving to grab the handle of the large sword on his back, but Aria had thrust the pommel of her spear at Erhart's throat before he could grab it.

「Resolve yourself if you're going to point your weapon at us. You won't be able to play it off as a joke.」

Sophia preached at Erhart's group indifferently.

「In the first place, Lyle-dono is our leader. You calling that leader as unreliable means that you're looking down on our entire party. Do you understand that you're not just making fun of Lyle-dono, but all of us?」

Erhart didn't know how to answer that. He glared at me.

「You coward, hiding behind a woman's back like this!」

Please don't say that, because it was slightly weighing me down too.

But, I was scared to step forward. It felt like Erhart really would draw his sword in this place if I did that.

「Look here, we don't want to get involved with you guys. I'm not taking the test because I have my own objective, that's all. In the first place it's none of your business, right?」

Why are you picking a quarrel with us, huh?!

Erhart's face went bright red and he yelled angrily when I told him that.

「You've got some nerve. Fight me!」

「—Don't wanna.」

「Fight me!」

I made a displeased face. Then May seemed fed up with this and casually threw a provocation at them.

「It's an animal's instinct to quarrel when competing for females. Lyle, just beat them up a bit.」

No, no, I wasn't working on instinct here.

I wished May wouldn't judge everything based on her own standards.

But, the Fifth who was kind to May was approving her opinion.

『May is really clever. Lyle, it won't be any problem if you just beat them up once to teach them the reality of their situation..』

The Third was exasperated by the Fifth's opinion

『Fifth, isn't that horrible? Making Lyle fight just because May-chan is adorable?』

Horrible. These guys were really horrible.

If you asked me what was so horrible—they were criticizing the Fifth, but none of them were telling me to settle the matter rationally either.

Everyone sounded like they were telling me 「Do it」.

I didn't want to become this kind of adult, so let's search for a rational solution.

H~m, I couldn't think of any solution.

Shannon was tilting her head.

「Onee-sama, why are those men picking a fight with Lyle? Even though their focus is directed at us rather than Lyle. Besides, there is a persistent gaze that keeps following me.」

Miranda's eyes turned sharp.

「Shannon, hide behind me. Putting that aside, we too don't have any time to waste here. We can't answer the expectations of you guys. You're a nuisance, so just get out of the way.」

Erhart's group jerked back from those blunt words.

Their gaze looked at me and Miranda alternately before Erhart pointed at me and yelled.

「Y-you're saying this guy is better than us, huh!?」

Miranda-san answered with a smile.

「Yes, that's right. He's a good man, right?」

It was embarrassing to hear such straightforward words. I could feel my face getting red.

The ancestors were getting noisy, shouting 『Miranda so cool!』 inside the Jewel. Conversely, they were also ridiculing me for being pathetic

Erhart gritted his teeth and turned his back toward us.

「We're going, you guys!」

After seeing off Erhart and the others, I noticed that Marianne-san was the only staff member remaining here.

She looked at me and chuckled.

「You're really loved. Looks like all of you are a good party.」

—It was doubtful whether they would even call each other comrades when the atmosphere was tense, though.

「I guess. They're too good for me.」

「Oh, how envious. But, men who don't know the circumstances will look at a harem party as if it were a bitter enemy. Something like what happened just now will happen quite often, you know?」

「Well, I have experienced it several times until now.」

「I see. But, don't resent them okay? Those kids are still young and rash.」

I had no intentions of resenting them.

But, if I were allowed to say it, I was also jealous of a party that consisted of only men.

It was mistaken for me to be the only man in our party in the first place.

Right now we also had Damian(ダミアン) with us, but he was purely a logistical support so he didn't count.

「Now then, I'll also explain about the quest for your party from tomorrow.」

「Ah, can I ask just one thing before that?」

「What is it?」

I asked Marianne-san to recommend an inn for us before talking about the quest.

.

Our actions from the next day—were very plain.

We got out of Beim's gate early in the morning and cleaned the highway.

A lot of humans and horses were coming and going endlessly on this path.

The area around the gate would immediately turn dirty if it was left alone.

It wouldn’t be any problem if it only looked dirty, but it was also a hygenic problem, so it was necessary to clean the area.

It was a plain yet important work, even though the job was mostly just gathering the filth and tossing it out.

It was simple, but there were few people who would be happy to do this kind of work.

That was why the adventurer guild undertook the job from Beim and made adventurers accept the job as a quest.

And then, there was one important thing.

The place was smelly, it was hard work, and then no matter how much you cleaned the place it would immediately get dirty again. Such a job—paid very little.

Shannon threw her shovel to the ground.

「I can’t do this anymore!」

I looked at Shannon’s act and felt angry.

「I told you we borrowed that! If you break it, we have to buy it!」

Shannon wasn’t dressed in her usual frilly dress. She was wearing fatigues, long boots, and gloves that would be fine even getting dirty.

Her long hair was tied into a bun behind her. With her current appearance, you wouldn’t be able to realize she was Shannon just from a glance.

「Why do I have to participate in the cleaning too!? You should do something like this by yourself!」

Right now Shannon and I were doing a plain and cheap quest.

Even though Beim was the home of adventurers, the quests that rookie adventurers could take were few.

The guild would prepare some jobs like this that anyone could do, and the rookies would choose from among them.

「It can’t be helped. Novem is taking the writing quest, while we can’t let May go out alone before we teach her some common sense.」

Shannon picked up the shovel and trembled.

「Why am I on poop duty, though!? Hey, why!? I don’t want to work! Even if I have to work, I want an easier job! Something intellectual and elegant!」

Shannon was voicing some splendid complaints, but she was still in the middle of learning how to read and write.

Her writing was also clumsy, so she was unable to work as a scribe.

Also Miranda said 「Let’s make her do something a bit tough」 and assigned her highway cleaning duty together with me.

「You can complain, but if you don't get to working, we'll never finish.」

「Other horses will immediately poop even if we clean the road! I can't do something like—ah!?」

A horse looked at us and dropped a dump at the place Shannon just cleaned. It even looked like it was laughing at us, and then it pulled its carriage forward and left.

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Shannon resumed cleaning while crying.

「Don't screw with me-! I was a noble lady who never even held anything heavier than a spoon, and now I have to clean poop!?」

The world was really harsh. It was also painful for me in the beginning.

「Move your hands and your mouth at the same time.」

「I'm doing it! More importantly, why are Aria and Sophia doing the writing job together with Novem, even though they're more suited for this, huh?! Normally it should be them doing this.」

Those two were taking a writing quest together with Novem.

The reason—it was also because Miranda was saying「We should have the two of them learn about various things other than fighting already」.

Shannon slipped on some horse feces and fell. I broke out in laughter after I saw that, guffawing as I pointed my finger at her.

「You slipped! —Oy, watch it!」

Seeing me laughing loudly at her, Shannon grabbed some horse feces and threw it at me.

「I'm going to—cover you in poop toooooo!」

「You, don't call yourself a lady when you keep saying poop with that mouth! That's vulgar!」

We got warned by the staff for making a commotion.

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—Monica was crying alone inside the corner of an inn's room.

「It's horrible. Even though I also want to be useful for chicken dickwad. And yet I'm made to stay home because of some stupid reason like needing a person to watch the stufff. This is too much!」

Monica, left behind to watch the room, had finished cleaning the room and every other thing she could possibly do, so she had some free time.

「Even though if this Monica is there, a trivial job like cleaning the street won't even take an hour!」

Certainly if it were Monica, she had the capability to finish cleaning the highway in a flash.

But, it would surely attract too much attention if she did that.

It was taken into consideration that she would be too conspicuous, so the other party members agreed that Monica should be the one to stay behind.

Monica was waiting for Lyle's return in the room, but then she noticed something and lifted her face to look at the door.

She stood up and unlocked the door right away. There wasn't any knocking sound.

「It's opened.」

Then the door opened, and Eva could be seen standing there with a surprised face.

「Y-you, don't open the door before I knock. You surprise me.」

「I will consider it if it's chicken dickwad, but there isn't any merit for me to be considerate to you.」

「You're really an annoying automata. But setting that aside, nobody's come back yet?」

Eva entered the room and took out her own luggage.

She opened her traveling bag while talking to Monica.

「It's still noon, after all. I think it will still take chicken dickwad five more hours until he returns.」

「I see. Then tell them that I will return late.」

Eva took out her stage outfits and worried which one to wear.

Monica made a guess when she saw that.

「Are you going to stand on stage?」

「I was requested by the manager of the elves. There is one elf that has to stay on a bed for a while, so he wants me to act as his substitute for a while.」

Eva had contacted the elves in Beim to gather some information. She wasn't doing any quests, but her role was still important.

She didn’t take long to decide her outfit and quickly changed into it. She then stood in front of a mirror to check her appearance. She made some poses to confirm that there wasn’t anything wrong with the outfit.

「Leaving that aside, where is Clara?」

Eva seemed curious about Clara. Monica snorted at her.

「Oh, are you acting tsundere to a fellow woman?」

「That’s not it. I don’t know what that girl is doing, so I thought I should ask just in case.」

Monica talked about Clara’s activity.

Clara also wasn’t receiving any quests, but she was at the adventurer guild.

「She is in the guild’s reference room. We asked that she investigate various things on Beim’s circumstances.」

Eva took off her outfit and prepared to go out while listening.

「That job seems suitable for her.」

The right person in the right place. It was a role that was suited for Clara.

Monica too could also do the same or perhaps even more than that.

But, Lyle judged that it would also be dangerous to rely on Monica alone, so he left the role to Clara.

They heard a knock just when Eva was about to leave with her luggage.

Miranda and may entered the room with tired faces.

Monica asked about the situation happily.

「Oh, did you two made a blunder or something?

May sat down and averted her face. Miranda was looking down at her with a sigh.

「May wouldn't leave the food stand.」

They heard May's excuse next.

「It was because Miranda said no, even though everything looked so delicious!」

Miranda crossed her arms under her breasts and looked irritated, her face twitching.

「We had talked about how you would learn about living in human society, hadn't we? I told you that I would buy those foods for you as a reward after we finished.」

「But you didn't buy them for me!」

「Because the lesson was cut short in the middle. Good grief, I'm worried for the future now.」

Miranda was taking May outside for sightseeing around Beim to teach her about human society.

Although Miranda's true objective laid in another place.

It was investigating Beim. She was walking around Beim in person in order to gather information.

Eva laughed at Miranda who had it hard with looking after May.

「Looks like you also have it hard.」

Miranda turned a cold gaze at Eva.

「It looks like you're having fun.」

「It's rare to see you suffer after all. Putting that aside, I'll be late coming back, sso everyone can eat without me.」

After Eva left, Miranda crouched to bring her gaze eye-level with the sulking May.

「May, we're going to go outside once more after lunch. If you keep your promise, I'll buy you sweets.」

「S-sweets? Y-yep—I'll do my best.」

May thought to herself that she'd work hard in the afternoon, since she wanted those delicious sweets—

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—At Beim's adventurer guild.

There was a partitioned counter inside the writing room.

The person who gave the quest would sit face to face with the person who accepted the quest in each partitioned area.

Sophia had finished one job and her upper body fell on the table after her client left.

「I-it's over.」

She had been writing for several people since the morning and felt completely wiped out now

She had no problems with something like a man working away from home wanting to write a letter to his family.

But she was at a complete loss when she was asked to write a love letter.

She could be angry if the client was just screwing around, and she could also just consider it an unpleasant job.

She was unable to do that because the client was really serious.

Her hands were smeared with ink from writing for various people since this morning. Even though she was usually swinging around a battle axe, she felt exhausted just from moving a pen around.

Aria who was sitting beside her was also the same.

「I don't want to continue anymoree~. I'd rather clean the highway than doing this.」

Sophia heard that complaining voice, so she leaned forward from her partitioned counter and peeked at Aria's desk.

Aria's hands were also smeared with ink.

「You've worked hard today, Aria.」

「You too. Even so, why is it us who got assigned here?」

It would be better to do physical labor compared to this. Sophia also had the same opinion.

Then Novem who had finished her work came to their place.

「It's because we want the two of you to learn about this kind of work. It's fine even if you aren't very good with this, but we can't possibly leave both of you completely unable to do this. This is Lyle-sama's decision.」

Even if they weren't suited for this work, they should at least have experience in it. Even Lyle wasn't planning to ask Sophia and Aria to be skilled in this line of work.

Sophia looked up at the ceiling.

「That Lyle-dono is cleaning the highway though.」

Novem made a grave face and looked down when she heard that.

「As I thought, perhaps it would be better if I also took the highway cleaning quest too. I'm feeling ashamed because this looks like we're pushing the heavy labor on Lyle-sama.」

Sophia and Aria looked at each other and shrugged.

「She is starting again.」

「Novem is really overprotective of Lyle. Sometimes she is really strict with him though. But setting that aside, I wonder, what's going to be for dinner?」

「I heard that the inn's dinner will have fish as the main dish. Fresh fish is cheap here because Beim has a harbor, so it looks like there'll be lots of different kinds of fish. I can't wait!」

The two were getting excited talking about dinner while watching Novem worrying—.

.

—Within a complicated alley of Beim, the atmosphere was totally different from the main street.

A person who seemed like a cook came out from a building. He threw some kitchen waste into a garbage can before returning inside again.

Erhart, watching that from a hiding spot, led his group to the garbage and started rummaging around in it.

「Oh, there is a full set of something nice today.」

What the cook discarded was the guests' leftover foods.

Erhart and his friends had to eat these leftovers in order to endure their hunger.

One of his friends let out a tearful voice.

「Hey, what's going to happen to us after this? Even though we finally managed to come to Beim, we're rummaging through trash bins to fill our stomachs. This is just pathetic.」

The other young men were also thinking the same. Their expression turned gloomy.

Then Erhart encouraged them all.

「You stupid idiots! This is just a temporary thing until we can enter the dungeon. If we're recognized as fully fledged adventurers there, we're going to earn as much money as we want after that. We're going to stay in a good inn, have good women take care of our every need, and consume extravagant meals and alcohol!」

They ran away from their birthplace because they had such a dream.

But, the reality was actually cruel. Erhart and his friends didn't even have that much money and could only live in a big room that they rented in a cheap inn. They also had no work and when they realized they had become penniless, they were chased out of their room. The difference between dreams and reality was like heaven and earth.

「It would be better to till the field in the village compared to this.」

Erhart desperately encouraged one of his complaining comrades.

「This life is going to be over soon! And then we'll be able to earn a lot of money after that. Or else, are you going to clean the highway everyday like that adventurer called Lyle?」

The highway cleaning job was the triple threat of smelly, dirty, and tiring. In addition, the pay was also low.

Erhart and his friends absolutely didn't want to accept such job.

But they were also unable to do other quests like writing and the like.

Among them, Erhart was the only one who was barely able to read and write.

They refused to do the quests that the guild provided for them and were flat broke.

「It's only for now. We're going to surpass that bunch soon and show those stupid women. We'll tell them, you idiot women, refusing our invitation like that!」

Erhart and his friends were somehow living in Beim while imagining such a delusion—.

.

On the night of the second week after we arrived in Beim. We had finished dinner and are relaxing in our rooms. We had three rooms, two four-people rooms and one single room.

I was using the single room. I had finished taking a bath and dinner. Right now I was spending my time leisurely.

I placed the Jewel on the bedside table and conversed with the ancestors.

My talking partner was the Fourth today.

『Even still, I'm surprised. I thought that if it's Lyle you would take the test.』

I was rejoicing inside my heart for betraying the Fouth's prediction.

Although it wasn't like I made my choice because I wanted to surprise him.

「We had only just arrived at Beim. I want to prioritize collecting information about this place. Going to the dungeon is also a charming offer, but there isn't much time until the test is going to start.」

Perhaps I would also take the test if there was more than one month's time.

But, I was glad that I chose the plain option.

『Thanks to that, you're doing well with collecting information.』

Clara was investigating the necessary things for living in Beim from the adventurer guild's reference room.

Eva was collecting various rumors from her fellow elves.

It seemed Miranda had found several information brokers in Beim.

May had learned a bit of common sense within these several days.

The remaining members were receiving the quests from the guild and steadily earned trust for our party.

—I think that we weren't doing bad.

If I chose to challenge the dungeon, the situation would become really busy and chaotic.

Right now I wanted to prepare while solidifying our foundation.

「It's only been two weeks, but we obtained quite the results. Even so, cleaning is also nice. It reminded me of the ditch cleaning that I did at the beginning.」

When I said that with a laugh, the Fourth replied with a delighted tone.

『You complained like Shannon in the past, but you've really changed in the past year.』

「That time when I was working as an adventurer without a clue is nostalgic.」

I was pretty horrible back then.

『And, what are you planning to do after this?』

「I also want to investigate the dungeon. After that—there is the matter of Damian, I guess?」

Damian was living outside Beim in the Dump Car together with Lily(リリィ)-san.

The vehicle was parked at an open space outside the wall, but the cost for renting that spot was also taking quite the amount of money, so I wanted to quickly search for a place where Damian could settle down.

『Beim is a place that's just like we hoped for, so it'll be best for you to search for a base soon.』

「A place where we can put Damian's Dump Car and also enough room for us to live there—I guess—a mansion—would be nice.」

I got sleepy and started to doze off. The Fourth spoke kindly to me.

『Looks like you're sleepy. Get some rest.』

「I'll—do that.」

I had to wake up early tommorow too, so I immediately went to sleep. I could hear the Fourth's kind voice.

『Sleep well, Lyle.』

Chapter 99 – Beim's Baptism

.

「W-what's this?」

—Erhart's face was twitching. He was watching the adventurers who were going to challenge Beim's dungeon.

Several parties were participating in the dungeon expedition spearheaded by Beim's adventurer guild.

The scale of the expedition is so large that even the number of people on logistical support exceeded 3000.

A large gate was built at the dungeon's entrance. The soldiers responsible for protecting the city of Beim were strictly guarding it.

His friends' faces were also twitching.

「Our village wouldn't have this many people, even if you gathered everyone up…」

「Oi, the guys over there are all wearing full plate armor.」

「What the hell's with this number?」

There were adventurers that are dressed like a knight order, and there were also people whose appearances were so overflowing with wildness that they could be mistaken as bandits.

There was an adventurer equipped with full plate armor, but an adventurer wearing fur and equipped with a battle axe could be seen standing right next to him.

The group had no sense of unity at all, but the adventurers here all had proper equipment.

Erhart felt that the greatsword on his back was seedy after being compared to them.

A guild staff approached the dumbfounded Erhart and his friends.

「Are you guys the party taking the test? Your name is—what messy handwriting. These letters, is your party called Griffon Cavalry?」

「That's right.」

The adventurers around them laughed when Erhart answered so.

One of them was a young man with orange hair that was short but a bit quirky. It seemed that he was a leader of a group with uniform light equipment.

Although they were equipped lightly, various tools were hanging from their belt. Their equipment could be said to be more complete than Erhart's group.

「Griffon Cavalryyy? I'm not seeing any griffon here. I don't even see a horse.」

Erhart glared at the laughing man.

「You bastard, do you want to say something to us, huh!?」

The man raised his hands in a surrendering gesture.

「Oops, my apologies. I didn't have enough sleep yesterday, but thanks to you guys being such a riot, my sleepiness has been blown away. My name is Albano(アルバーノ). I'm leading these guys.」

The young man laughed flippantly. He looked a bit older than Erhart's group.

He looked frivolous, but he had a trained body and his weapon was also well-maintained.

Erhart was about to throw himself at that Albano, but a man wearing full plate armor got in his way.

「Albano, it's you guys again!」

That man looked overly serious. His black hair was swept all the way back.

He was also tall, and seriousness could be seen oozing out of his face.

The members of the party that he was leading were all dressed like knights.

They were wearing metal armor and even brought horses with them.

Erhart made a face of detest upon seeing that person.

「Creit, huh? You guys are so stuffy even in the morning.」

Creit's group looked the complete opposite of the frivolous looking group. Creit's voice was also loud and gathered the attention of the surroundings.

He stood imposingly with his fists clenched and began to preach at Albano.

「You guys are making trouble with the rookies again! You would provoke them to pick a fight with you before turning the table on them, stop doing something like that. They are our fellow comrades in this expedition.」

That Creit—Creit Benini(クレート・ベニーニ)'s claim made Albano, who was sitting on a wooden box, point to Erhart's group with a jerk of his chin as he replied.

「Look carefully at these guys. Do you think that in their getup they'll be able to do the same work as us? They smell like garbage,

and they also don't have any decent equipment. They're just some stupid newbies taking the guild's proficiency test. It'd be better for them to run back home quickly.」

Creit turned his gaze toward Erhart's group before he closed his eyes with a slightly troubled look.

「The guild has allowed their participation. Surely, they too are promising adventurers.」

Albano started laughing while holding his stomach.

「Promising!? Ain't no way that's the case. The guild's just getting rid of nuisances.」

The two of them were apparently acquainted with each other, but their personalities were the complete opposite of one another's.

Because of that, they always disagreed with each other.

Although such a thing didn't matter to Erhart.

Erhart felt that he was made fun of and gripped his sword's handle.

「—Who are you calling nuisances to be rid of? Then how about you have a taste of me here?」

Seeing the action of the young and ignorant Erhart, the eyes of Creit who was covering up for him until now turned cold.

「Take your hand off your weapon. You won't be able to win against Albano.」

Erhart got enraged by those words. His face went red, and he started throwing a tantrum.

「What the hell do you know, huh!? I'm someone who has three Arts. No one could beat me at my village. Even my father lost against me!」

Creit tilted his head hearing Erhart's words.

「Three Arts? Forgive me but, I'm not seeing any magic tool on your body?」

「Magic tool? What the hell is that! Don't say any nonsense you bastard!」

Albano scratched his head with a troubled look when he heard that.

「Which country stick did you come from, huh? Or rather, what kind of Arts do you got?」

Erhart activated his Arts and his arm muscles swelled up.

There was ripping sound from his arms. Even his height got slightly taller.

Blood veins pulsed all over his body.

「How's that? Amazing, right?」

It was a transformation that was clearly a body strengthening Art at a glance.

Albano's face turned serious seeing that.

「H~m, ain't that amazing. I'll apologize for my words just now. Seems like you'll be useful for carrying our luggage after all.」

Erhart felt something snapping inside himself.

「I'll kill you!」

He forgot himself in his rage and grabbed his great sword. He then charged toward Albano—and fell hard on the ground.

「Buh!?」

He fell into a daze because of a strong hit to his face. THen, a man came upon hearing the commotion.

The man looked like he was in his late thirties. His blonde hair was parted on one side, making him look very straight-laced.

In fact, the way he talked was also serious.

「What are you guys doing?」

Both Albano and Creit , the ones being addressed, were nervous.

「Geh! It's boss Neu. A troublesome one came.」

「Albano, you're being rude to Neu-dono!」

His name was Neu Neumann(ノイ・ノイマン).

His name was entered to be the vice captain of the expedition group and he was treated as leader in this group.

That was just how high the guild's evaluation for him is.

That Neu helped Erhart to stand up.

「Albano, I told you before to not pick any quarrels before the departure.」

「I know.」

Even Albano became obedient when Neu arrived.

Neu talked to Erhart.

「You're—a rookie who is taking the test?」

「That's right!」

Erhart wiped his nosebleed with his hand while replying.

「I'm telling you this for your own good. Don't get into any fights. This is a test. The guild staff is watching your actions. If you cause trouble, you will fail the test no matter how strong you are.」

After being told that, even Erhart could only lower his raised fist.

He didn't want to go back to back-alley living.

He wanted to be recognized as a fully fledged adventurer right away and take actual proper quests.

「I-I get it.」

Neu watched Albano and Creit leave this place, and then he also left.

Before he left, he didn't forget to give Erhart a word of advice.

「Also, if you're going to fight then pick your opponent correctly. Albano is strong.」

Erhart thought as his friends were asking him if he was alright.

(I'll defeat him right away and show who's stronger here.)

.

—Beim's dungeon was very mysterious.

There was a large hole that opened up with a spiraling path along the side.

But it would be more accurate to call the path a town.

Dilapidated houses that looked like they could crumble any moment were filling the path. Those buildings formed small alleyways that ended up creating a maze.

There was the dazzling light that shined from the central hole, but it was still dim no matter what due tothe ceiling.

Because of the spiraling structure, when one looked up the place that they had previously passed through would also look like the ceiling. Mysteriously, at the reverse side of the ground, there was also a townscape that was covered with buildings just like on the surface.

When night came, the torches inside the dungeon would light up with a bluish white flame. It made the place needlessly scary.

To begin with, the hole itself was huge. Its diameter was more than 3000 meters. When one looked at the opposite side, the place they had just passed some time ago would look really small.

They were going down a spiraling road on a hill, but the width of the road itself was really wide.

It had a width of three meters.

Erhart was looking down from the edge of the path, but the bottom was pitch black and he couldn’t see anything.

「S-so this is a dungeon.」

They were placed at the center of the column, so they still hadn’t gone through any battles.

But sometimes he could hear the yells of humans and the roars of monsters from the front.

This was an eerie place.

When Erhart turned around, his friends were walking using wooden sticks as canes.

「Erhart, I'm feeling painful for some reason.」

「It feels unpleasant.」

「Are the guys around us alright?」

Erhart acted tough when he saw his comrades looking drunk.

「Just this much ain't any problem at all! Forget about that, isn't there an easier way if we're just going down?」

One of his comrades looked up at the ceiling with a puzzled look.

It was already strange that there was an upside down city above them, but the dim place with dilapidated buildings felt ominous.

「H-hey, even though there is a hole this deep, why isn't it that Beim, which is on top of this hole, falling? It makes me scared.」

Erhart couldn't answer even if he was asked that question.

「T-that's, you know! There's a super thick plank on the hole and the city is built on top of it.」

Then Neu who was keeping an eye on the surroundings safety from the center told Erhart the answer.

「Is this your first time in a dungeon?」

「Neu—san.」

Erhart wasn't good at all when facing a calm adult like Neu.

「According to a famous scholar, it seems dungeons are located inside a different space. We're only entering into that space. That's

why, no matter how far you dig down in Beim, you'll only find more dirt.」

He told Erhart the answer, but Erhart was unable to understand the meaning at all.

「I, I see, is that so.」

Neu laughed with a troubled face.

「That means Beim will never fall into the hole. More importantly it's time to rest. We're going to rest here for one day, so help us out.」

When Erhart looked around, people were starting to prepare the campsite.

Erhart scratched his head.

「Say, Neu-san.」

「What is it?」

「There is a device in the dungeon to travel through floors, isn't there? Wouldn't it be faster to use that to go until we reached our destination?」

Neu understood what Erhart wanted to say and showed an exasperated expression.

「Haven't you heard? We have multiple objectives this time. One of them is to challenge the dungeon from the surface and exterminate the monsters near the entrance. That objective won't be achieved if we skip floors.」

「Aa~, is that so? But, it's still better to go down quickly. Then, if we use some rope to go down, that'll also make it faster, won't it?」

When he peered down, he could see the same town that they had passed through until now here at the nearby level.

Neu sighed.

「Absolutely don't try that. Every year there will be adventurers who try something like that, but they will get sucked in by the hole and never come back. It's like that saying, don't search for the shortcut.」

Erhart's group made a fed up face after Neu left.

「—We won't be able to show our stuff off if we keep staying here. You guys, no need to help out and just rest your body. Our job is defeating monsters after all.」

Erhart's group, dissatisfied since they didn't have a chance to raise any achievements, went to hide and rested without helping to set up the campsite—

.

—About two weeks have passed since the start of the expedition.

The treatment that Erhart's group received was still the same.

They entered a single dilapidated house and sat around a wobbly table while eating the soup meant to be their lunch.

The soup was accompanied with hard bread.

It was nice that they could eat three times a day just by participating in the expedition, but Erhart's group was still dissatisfied.

「The food is the same every day.」

「Even though the guys who fight can eat meat, we're only given vegetable scraps and hard bread.」

「This is because they won't allow us to go to the front even when we ask.」

At this rate the chance to raise achievements wouldn't arrive no matter how long they waited.

Erhart resolved himself.

「You guys, listen. Tonight we're going to sneak out and go to the front.」

「So we're finally going to do it!」

The young men's eyes were shining in anticipation of finally being able to defeat monsters just like real adventurers.

「It's useless no matter how much we ask Neu-san. As I thought, it'll be better here if we proactively go to the front and show our strength.」

When the night came and they confirmed that everyone had gone to sleep, Erhart's group started moving in order to join the group at the front.

Sometimes there would also be a patrol, but in this place they had no lack of hiding places.

Erhart's group sneaked out like that and moved through the path that had become darker than when it was afternoon.

They created torches and moved with Erhart at the front—then they heard an animal's voice.

Erhart drew out his greatsword and held it at the ready.

「Oi, use the torch to search for the enemy! I'll hack it apart.」

The nervous young men illuminated the surrounding with their torches, and then an injured monster with a wolf-like appearance became visible.

Its red eyes were shining with an eerie light.

「O-oi!」

「I never saw this kind of monster!」

「S-someone help」

Erhart's friends were surprised by the monster's appearance and fell into chaos.

It couldn't be helped. That wolf was bigger than themselves.

Its size was too different than the monsters that they saw near their village.

Erhart took a stance with his greatsword and bulged his muscles up.

「Don't get scared, you guys! Only this monster's appearance is scary! I'll take it down in one go!」

Erhart brandished his greatsword and then he swung it down.

Erhart had defeated monsters in this way many times.

He swung the lump of iron with his inflated muscles—with his Arts' power as hard as he possibly could.

Erhart had never even once seen a monster that could endure this attack.

But, the wolf in front of him became the first monster that managed that.

「Wha-!?」

The wolf quickly stepped back to dodge Erhart's greatsword. The sword tip thrust into the ground deeply.

When he tried to pull the sword out quickly, the wolf bit at the greatsword as though to ridicule Erhart's lack of composure.

「L-let go!」

Erhart struggled to take back his great sword, but the wolf didn't let go and crunched it into pieces.

The young men screamed when they saw that.

「I-IT'S HOPELESSSS!」

「AIN'T NO WAY WE CAN WIN AGAINST SOMETHING LIKE THIS!」

「THAT'S WHY I SAID THAT I DIDN'T WANT TO COME HERE!」

The young man ran away.

Erhart who lost his comrades and also lost the light of the torches was trembling all over within the darkness.

The wolf seemed amused by Erhart's state. It was moving around Erhart while growling, as though it were trying to stir up his fear.

「Dammit. Dammit. DAMMITTTTTTT!」

Erhart was yelling while his body trembles. He ran to the direction of where the wolf's footstep came from.

He wanted to punch the wolf, but he collided on a dilapidated house's wall and bounced back, falling on the ground.

The wolf placed its front leg on Erhart's chest, who was lying down facce up.

And then it brought its face close. Its drool was trickling down onto Erhart's face.

「S-sto—」

The wolf opened its mouth wide and its smelly breath reached his nose.

Tears were trickling out of his eyes due to the terror. The area between his legs became warm and damp. The smell of ammonia was spreading to the surroundings.

Then—.

「Haa, so it's you.」

—He heard an annoyed voice. The wolf raised its face and looked back.

What Erhart saw was multiple lights that had approached near them without him noticing.

With a lantern's light illuminating the surrounding, he faintly saw a young man with orange hair jumping down from a house's rooftop holding a one-handed sword.

The wolf didn't even have the time to notice the young man. Its neck was cut off right away by the one-handed sword.

Erhart was showered by the blood that spurted out of the wolf's neck as he watched what happened in a daze.

The wolf's body slowly fell down.

「Hih!」

His body finally became able to move again, together with the shock. He backed away with his butt still touching the ground. Then he noticed that it was Albano who severed the head of the wolf.

He defeated a monster that he couldn't win against with a weapon that was smaller than his.

He couldn't believe that.

Albano's comrades came holding lanterns after that and surrounded Erhart.

「Geh, this guy is covered in blood.」

「It's the monster's blood. More importantly, it stinks here.」

「Did he wet his pants?」

Erhart then fainted in front of the laughing adventurers—.

.

—The next day.

Erhart's group used the floor transfer device in the dungeon to return to the surface.

They were dragged to the adventurer guild. Waiting for them there was Marianne and her superior. That superior talked to Erhart's group with a condescending attitude.

「So—you guys ignored orders, and on top of that you almost died because of that. The evaluation of all of you is written on this paper. It said, you guys only ate for free without even helping out with anything.」

They weren't useful at all in battle.

Not only that, they were completely uncooperative. They didn't even help with preparing the campsite. And yet they never missed asking for food. What would the people around them think of such adventurers?

Naturally their evaluation result was the worst.

The male staff in his forties looked at the depressed Erhart's group and snorted.

「It looks like all of you understand now just how powerless you are. You all don't even have any decent equipment and can only talk big, that's the reality of your current situation. How about you all just go back home quietly?」

Erhart lifted his face and glared at the guild staff, but there were armed guards behind him and Marianne.

Erhart could only keep his mouth shut. He casted his gaze down and clenched his fist.

His other friends were also doing the same.

There was also how they ran away and left Erhart behind. They kept quiet without saying anything.

Rather, there were even some among them who looked relieved, wanting to return back to their village.

Erhart didn't miss the faces of several of his friends that let out a sigh of relief, thinking they'd be able to return home with this.

「I won't understand anything if you don't say anything. Why did all of you do such thing—」

「Please wait. These kids have also tried their best.」

Marianne cut off her superior's words and stood up for Erhart's group.

「Certainly they might be reckless, but an adventurer should at least have that much guts. Wouldn't it be fine for us to watch over these kids for just a bit longer?」

The superior made a troubled face by Marianne's appeal.

「—Will you take responsibility for them? They have caused trouble for the guild, you know?」

Would you look after these guys?

Marianne nodded with a serious expression at that question.

「Please allow me to be in charge of these kids. If they still wish to remain in Beim even after this, I will firmly take care of them as their exclusive advisor. I swear I will turn them into fully fledged adventurers no matter what.」

Erhart raised his face when he heard those earnest words of Marianne.

He felt so happy that tears came out.

No one had ever treated him this kindly since he had come to this metropolis.

「Marianne-san, I—I,」

Marianne comforted the crying Erhart.

「It's alright. But, I will be strict with you from here on. Will you listen to my words properly?」

Erhart nodded.

「Y-yes! I'll do my best for Marianne-san's sake!」

Marianne smiled to hear that. Her superior shrugged.

「Let's do our best together.」

「Yes!」

Like this, Erhart's group ended their test in failure.

They only joined the expedition for two weeks before leaving halfway through.

Chapter 100 – Life in Beim

.

One month has passed since we arrived at the Freedom City Beim.

Our days here were fundamentally about accepting and completing quests from the guild for about five days a week.

We had the remaining two days for rest, but—

「Sophia, you cheater!」

「W-what are you talking about?」

—We were learning something new.

Today, all of us traveled to a ranch located outside Beim.

It was possible to learn horse riding using the horses raised in this place.

Aria is a lively girl who was a former noble. It seemed she had experience in horse-riding and was immediately able to skillfully ride a horse.

Sophia saw that and her sense of rivalry was set ablaze.

It seemed Sophia also had experience in horse-riding, but she was less skilled than Aria.

This led to the two of them racing each other on horseback.

At first, Aria was pulling ahead, but Sophia caught up and overtook her. Aria, her sense of rivalry also set ablaze, spurred her horse onwards

It was the beginning of a heated race.

They repeatedly overtook each other, and before anyone realized it, it became a true race.

At first, Aria had the advantage. But…

「You used your Arts because it looked like you were about to lose, didn't you!?」

—Sophia didn't want to lose and used her Arts.

Sophia's Arts changed the weight of herself and the thing that she was touching.

Even just lightening her weight would become a great assistance to the horse.

「What are you talking about? Please stop with the false accusations.」

Sophia tried to feign ignorance, but her expression was stiff. It was immediately clear that she was lying.

Aria noticed the lie and her blood rose up to her head. She then used her own Arts too.

「Don't underestimate me! Even I can accelerate if I use my Arts—e-eh!?」

Aria's Art was the type that accelerated herself, but it was pointless to use it while she was riding a horse.

Even if she was able to move quickly, it wouldn't affect the horse at all.

Sophia was laughing.

「Looks like this is my win, Aria!」

「THIS CHEATERRRRR!」

The other party members also laughed seeing Aria's flustered state.

「Aria is really stupid. Even though her Arts can only make herself move fast.」

Eva, who was already used to riding a horse, looked like she was having fun after not doing this for so long.

Miranda was also the same.

「No, I'd say the both of them are really stupid. Well, let's just think of it as a good thing that they noticed about their Arts' quirks during training. Setting that aside, Shannon—it's no good if you hug the horse like that.」

However, Miranda was responsible for looking after the problem child Shannon.

Shannon was straddling a small pony. Her body was trembling uncontrollably as she hugged the pony's neck.

「Because it's scary mon!」

I turned my gaze away from Shannon and looked toward Clara, who was also riding a horse for the first time. She was receiving instructions from Novem.

「Clara-san, please calm down. Also, straighten your back.」

「Impossible. Impossible! This is absolutely impossible! I-I-I'll get seriously injured if I fall from here!」

Even though it didn't really look like it, it felt like you were up high while you were riding a horse

It was a bit scary if you looked down.

The Third was worried for Clara.

『Won't it be better for Clara-chan to stop before she injures herself? In the first place, is there even any need to learn how to ride a horse because of Porter? Clara-chan looks pitiful.』

The Seventh remonstrated the Third.

『What's important is the experience. It's hard to find the chance for this. Clara should also experience how to ride a horse.』

Clara was normally calm and composed, but right now you could see her trembling on top of a horse.

Her eyes looked tearful and she was talking very loudly. This was really a precious sight.

And then, when I looked at my other companion—at May, the Fifth muttered happily from inside the Jewel.

『Animals are really nice. They heal you, so we should come here every week.』

It was obviously impossible to come here every week.

The Fifth's voice sounded excited, unlike his usual self.

『Lyle, look at May. She looks like she's having fun. As I thought, animals are great.』

Horses and other animals were gathering around May.

「H~m, it feels strange for me to ride a horse.」

The horse that May was riding looked nervous. It made me pity it.

May was a qilin. Perhaps the animals were able to sense that?

And then, as for Monica—she was pulling the horse that I was riding.

In her case, it didn't look like there was any need for her to ride a horse, since she was able to run faster than one.

「Good grief. They're really noisy. Even so, chicken dickwad, you're skilled in horse riding. Even though I was hoping that you would be trembling and showed a little bit more of your hopeless to me.」

「—You, what kind of person do you think I am in that head of yours? Although I don't look like it, I'm still the former heir of a Count house. It was only obvious that I had learned how to ride horse…perhaps.」

I couldn't remember my past because of Celes stealing my memory, but it did seem like my body knew how to ride a horse.

I had no problem making the horse walk or run.

But I couldn't ride it as skilled as Aria.

In the first place, Aria was too skilled.

「I finally catch up! Sophia, you won't get away!」

「How can you catch up even with this!?」

The horse that Aria was riding was catching up to the horse of Sophia who was using Arts.

Aria was really good at horse riding.

It was Miranda who found this facility.

It was a result of her going outside the city and collecting rumors. She also collected other pieces of information about private schools and dojos.

Eva approached me on her horse.

「It looks like Lyle doesn't have any problems.」

「I think I need to practice some more though. More importantly, do you need something?」

When I asked her reason for talking to me, Eva rode her horse up next to me.

Eva was also skilled with riding a horse.

「I heard about a rumor before this so I'm thinking I should tell you about it. —Do you know about Zayin(ザイン)?」

Zayin Theocracy was a country near Beim.

Around Beim was a gathering of small countries that continuously skirmish against one another.

There were adventurers who also worked a side business as a mercenary in order to participate in those skirmishes and earn some money.

Zayin was a relatively large country among the other neighboring countries.

Just a little while ago—or to be more accurate several dozens of years ago, even if it was only called a little while ago in the history books, Zayin snatched some territory from a country called Lorphys(ロルフィス) and became a country that was just a size larger among the smaller countries.

I had heard about that information from Clara, but Eva would be sullen if I mentioned Clara's name so I elected to stay quiet.

「It's a country that is categorized as large among the countries surrounding Beim, isn't it?」

「About that country though, it seems that there's internal conflict going on there right now.」

「Really?」

「There is no definite proof though. But, there are a lot of suspicious rumors coming from there.」

Was there a civil war going on in Zayin?

Eva had obtained such a story.

The Sixth was starting to plan something bad again in the Jewel.

『A religious country? It sounds a bit troublesome but—it'll be interesting if we can make use of that conflict well.』

The Third sounded disagreeable to that line of thought.

『Isn't it impossible for Lyle right now? Even his comrades are few in number, and even if he does start up a mercenary group, it'll still be far in the future.』

The Sixth sounded disappointed.

『That's too bad, even though it looks like there's a chance to take advantage of this.』

—No, even if you talked about taking advantage of a place that was in trouble……

These people were horrible as usual.

But, certainly there might be information that we could use somehow.

「Eva, I have a request.」

「What?」

「Can you gather rumors and information about that Zayin?」

Evan made a delighted expression.

「Oh? Do you have some kind of idea? Got it. I'll try asking my fellow elves who came from the direction of Zayin. I'll also talk to Miranda.」

「To Miranda?」

「That girl has several information broker acquaintances after all, so perhaps she has also heard something about this from them.」

「Then I'll leave it to you.」

We got a lot of results in this one month.

Everyone was really reliable.

.

I talked with the owner of the ranch and entrusted Damian's Dump Car to him.

I was facing Damian inside the Dump Car.

「H~m, and so you were taking plain jobs as adventurer.」

Damian was drinking an overly sweet coffee. It seemed he was interested in what we were doing.

「Well, I guess that's fine. After all, it's important to gather information. But putting that aside, is there no place where we can

settle down inside Beim? There are a lot of tools available in Beim, and it'll make it easier for me if I have a lab inside the city.」

I wanted to listen to Damian's request, but I too didn't have that much money right now.

The amount of money I had was a lot from the perspective of an adventurer, but it was necessary to save money right now if we are considering the future.

「Our expenses right now are large, so I'm thinking of saving money for now. We might be able to enter the dungeon after three months. We're planning to earn money then.」

「If it's you, Lyle, then you won't have any problem earning money. But how about going a step further and searching for a merchant patron?」

「Patron, huh? I'm considering it.」

Beim was the city of adventurers—and merchants.

There were a lot of wealthy merchants here who earned immense wealth from trade. It would make it easier for us to take action in Beim if we could get one of them to be our backer.

The problem was about who we should promote ourselves to.

We wouldn't be able to negotiate unless the other side was interested in us.

The merchant's disposition would be important too.

We couldn't join hands with a merchant who would only make use of us until we became useless for him.

「If we're thinking about the future, then a major merchant will be ideal. But right now when we still don't have any reputation to speak of, we're focusing on gathering information.」

Damian looked disappointed.

「It can't be helped. If Lyle gets a patron than money will also flow to me, so please look for a big company if possible.」

Even if he asked me to provide him funding as though it was only natural—that was troubling.

But, Damian was a genius.

He would develop useful tools for us in the future—perhaps.

「Damian, don't do anything too reckless, okay?」

「Hahaha! —I'll keep it in mind.」

He laughed at first, but then his face turned serious and muttered the rest as he averted my gaze from me.

No good.

This guy would absolutely do something that he was interested in without considering the consequences

The Fourth was thinking seriously about the patron inside the Jewel.

『We have also investigated various things about the merchants, but we have to move very carefully in this matter. I want more information.』

The Seventh was also careful.

『Indeed. We want to avoid getting treated like a disposable tool. After all, merchants are shrewd when it comes to profit. That'll be even truer when the merchant is a major one.』

In other words, if the merchant thought that we were a drawback—they wouldn't hesitate to betray us.

The Third was giving a different opinion from those two.

『You two are too careful. But you know, I don't think we'll be able to win against Celes if we don't make use of those kind of people too. Well, I agree that we need to gather more information though.』

It was easier before when I just needed to think about how to earn money as an adventurer.

.

I said farewell to Damian and headed to the adventurer guild.

I was going there to check on Clara who was researching things in the reference room.

The Third's excited voice came from inside the Jewel.

『Beim's adventurer guild is amazing. This is even better than a third rate library.』

I entered a door that had a plate with "reference room" written on it, and saw what looked like the inside of a library.

The shelves were high and reached until the ceiling. There were stepladders prepared to help reach those high places.

The room was also spacious. There was even staff that was assigned here to manage the place.

I talked to the staff at the counter.

「Are you looking for some kind of data?」

「I came to pick up my companion.」

「I see. Please talk to me if you want to investigate something.」

Among the books that were prepared inside the reference room, there were also books like light novels and miscellaneous writings that were unrelated to the adventurer profession.

It looked like this place could also be used as a normal library.

In fact, there were some adventurers who were reading for enjoyment here.

A large muscular man with a splendid moustache was reading a picture book while learning how to read the letters.

There was also an adventurer who was dressed like a magician studying several books that were related to magic piled up in front of him.

There were quite a lot of people making use of this place.

「This place really looks like a library.」

The Third sounded delighted.

『It's inferior when compared to Arumsaas(アラムサース), but it's amazing that the guild has a library this big. That means that Beim itself must have a splendid library of its own too. I'm jealous.』

The city itself also had its own library. Clara said that that place was even more magnificent than this reference room.

I searched for Clara and found her right away.

She had several books placed on the table. She was reading them and also taking memos.

The Third spoke with a warm voice when he saw that.

『H~m, Clara-chan is also doing her best. Lyle, treat her to tea or something later.』

The Third was soft on Clara.

It seemed he himself also liked to read, so he favored Clara because they had the same hobby.

「Please don't ask me something unreasonable. —Clara, I came to pick you up.」

I admonished the Third with a small voice while walking toward Clara and calling out to her.

Clara lifted her eyes and took off her glasses before she stretched her body.

「So it's that time already.」

Clara looked at the clock inside the reference room, but she had taken off her glasses so she couldn't see clearly.

She narrowed her eyes.

She had quite a clumsy side to her when she was unfocused.

「It's already evening. Shannon will get angry again if you come back too late. So I came to pick you up.」

Clara was in charge of investigating things through the reference room.

We were gathering information in order to live in Beim as adventurers.

I was also asking her to investigate other things like the history and circumstances of this place and the surrounding area.

The person herself loved to read, so she didn't think of it as work and enjoyed it. Because of that, she often came back late.

「I'm sorry to have worried you.」

She came home late at night several days ago and was scolded by Eva and Shannon.

Well, rather than angry—it was more that they were worried.

「Is there any interesting information?」

「Interesting or not will depend on each person's subjectivity, so I can't really give a guarantee. But, there are various interesting stories regarding Beim.」

「What?」

I sat on the chair beside her and talked with a small voice so as to not disturb the other people.

Clara started tidying up the materials while continuing to talk.

「It's about Beim's dungeon. It's a large vertical hole with a path spiraling downward along the wall. If we look at it on the whole, it's a dungeon with a single continuous path.」

I couldn't imagine it even after she told me.

「A spiraling path?」

「It's something like this.」

Clara drew a diagram on a memo paper before I finally understood.

The dungeon's structure was like a spiral staircase.

「It seems we have to walk down a slope with dilapidated houses lined up through the path. But it's the same with other dungeons in that the deeper we go, the stronger the monsters become.」

Dungeon.

Dungeons had varied shapes, but the deeper you went the stronger the monster became and the treasure would also become greater.

Every dungeon was the same in regards to that.

「What about the floor transfer device?」

「The dungeon has it. Unlike Arumsaas, it seems that this device's shape is only a round floor. It will float in the air and people can go up or down by riding it.

This kind of convenient device would definitely exist in a large scale dungeon.

There was a hypothesis that the dungeon prepared it so that adventurers could advance even deeper.

「Beim's dungeon is strange huh. And what about the interesting story you mentioned?」

「It's from here. About that dungeon, people believe that it has more than 100 floors deep.」

「—That's deep.」

「There is no adventurer that has even reached the deepest part though. Though even if there is an adventurer who can manage that, they wouldn't be allowed to destroy the dungeon.」

The dungeon in Beim was a managed dungeon.

The dungeon was alive. It would vanish if it was subjugated.

If the dungeon vanished, people would become unable to obtain monster body parts and magic stones.

It was the same with the treasures.

That was why it was profitable to manage a dungeon without subjugating it.

The dungeon was greatly related to Beim's development, so people were protecting it.

「So it's not an exaggeration to call the dungeon here as number one in the world.」

「Well, a dungeon with a scale this large is rare. Many people commented that exploring the dungeon feels like walking through a destroyed city.」

It felt like walking through a desolate city even though it was inside a dungeon?

In that case, the way to fight in it would also be different.

「I'm also investigating the types of monsters that are appearing in it. Ah, I almost forgot. I haven't talked about the most important story.」

「Important story?」

「About the standard of Beim's adventurer guild to ascertain the adventurers who can enter the dungeon. It's mentioned inside the material here.」

The Third praised Clara after he heard that.

『Good job! As I thought, Clara-chan is really reliable.』

The Fifth was exasperated at the Third. He was doubting the reference materials in this place.

『Learning about a test's standard in a reference room? —Is it a test to check whether the adventurer is a type that will thoroughly prepare in advance or not?』

Was it that important to investigate properly in the reference room beforehand?

「Clara, great job.」

「Yes?」

It seemed Clara didn't understand why she was being praised. She tilted her head.

.

When we returned to the inn, Miranda was waiting for me.

「So you were together with Clara.」

「I went to pick her up—even so.」

Clara headed to the bathroom. There was only Miranda and I inside the room—or not, because there was also May who looked listless in her qilin form.

She was sprawled on the floor sleeping with a tired face.

The Fifth was worried seeing May looking like that. The Sixth was trying to calm him down.

『Oi, what did you do!? What did you do to May!?』

『Fifth, please calm down.』

I also got curious and asked Miranda.

「Why is May looking that tired?」

「I was just teaching her some common sense. As I thought, her way of thinking is different so it looks like she has it rough. She has worked particularly hard today so she got tired and fell asleep. With this, even if she went out alone—well, I'll still be worried but it won't take too long before she'll be able to go out by herself.」

Qilin had a long life. Their senses were different from humans.

Because of that difference, it was difficult for them to get used to human society.

It seemed that she was getting quite used to it recently, but Miranda who was looking after May also had it hard.

「Miranda must also have it hard teaching her until this point.」

「I'm used to it from taking care of Shannon. But putting that aside, this is the information that you requested.」

I accepted the documents from Miranda and checked the contents.

The ancestors inside the Jewel showed their interest.

『Zayin Theocracy is a strange country, isn't it? The king will change when it hasn't even been ten years? No, the queen, I guess.』

『Queen, huh. It seems the woman holds the highest position in that country.』

『—Looks like this saint is just a figurehead. Isn't it the priests under her who are taking control of the government?』

『But, recently a single saint has been in reign continuously. Since she was fifteen years old—for fifteen years. Perhaps there is opposition from her holding too much influence.』

『There are a lot of openings that can be taken advantage of here. But, unfortunately Lyle can't do anything about it in his current state.』

The country called Zayin was a theocracy.

The saint ruled as the sovereign and the priests working under her carry out the processes of government.

Normally a saint would hold her position for three years at the shortest. Even if she could hold her position longer than that it would be six years—or perhaps nine years at the longest.

However the current saint had held her position for fifteen years. Even throughout all the generations of saints she could be counted as one of the top three.

I continued reading the document. That saint right now was in a confrontation with the knight order that was the military of Zayin. This knight order was harboring dissatisfaction towards the saint.

The document mentioned that knight order commander was currently in the middle of political struggle with the saint.

「Perhaps the saint holds too much authority?」

When I spoke my honest impression, Miranda looked at me and said 「Too bad」.

「Certainly this saint might be someone who managed to seize quite a lot of political power even among all the saints before her. But, the number of skirmishes with the neighboring countries has decreased sharply since this person ascended to her position.」

「Decreased?」

When I looked at another document, surprisingly Zayin had instigated many wars with other countries in the past.

It would go into war at least once a year. Even skirmishes were like an everyday occurrence for them.

「—This is horrible.」

The ancestors were also agreeing with me.

『There is a lot of war around Beim. —And the one profiting from that are the adventurers in mercenary business huh. No, the merchants perhaps?』

The other ancestors stayed silent after the Third said that.

The current saint was known to be in the moderate faction. She decreased the number of wars drastically and focused the country's effort into domestic affairs in order to change Zayin.

「The number of skirmishes in this area is already high since the start, but recently the number of wars is decreasing and the knight order is angrily demanding for war so they can amass achievements. That's the situation from an outsider's perspective.」

「Hee~」

I expressed my admiration. Then Miranda sat on the armrest of the sofa I was sitting on and brought her face closer.

「And? What are you planning on doing by investigating this country?」

「Right now we can't do anything about it. Our party's size isn't on the scale of mercenary group, so we can't promote ourselves to this country.」

We couldn't get involved with something like war with how small our number was.

We might be able to make great contributions there, but there wouldn't be anyone there who would want to ally themselves with us.

We would only get treated like disposable tools in our current state.

The saint or the knight order—it would be difficult to ally ourselves with either of them.

「Well, that's true. If we are more famous and stronger, then perhaps we'd be able to raise distinguished achievements there.」

In the first place, the reason I wanted to get involved there was to gain a reputation—and yet to do that we needed reputation first. It was difficult.

It was just as the Seventh said, I couldn't do anything about this with how I am right now.

Miranda looked at me with an amused expression.

What was I thinking, what would I do—it was as though she were enjoying it.

「Lyle, what’re we going to investigate next?」

「—I want to raise our reputation as adventurers first. Perhaps we should start investigating the famous adventurers or parties in Beim.」

First let’s raise our reputation steadily, step by step.

.

One day while we were continuing our plain life in Beim.

「Geh! You’re…」

「Ah」

When we went out to clean the highway—Erhart’s group appeared in front of us.

They immediately made a displeased expression as soon as we met without even bothering to mask it.

Erhart’s group was dressed in fatigues just like us.

Erhart seemed to be embarrassed to be seen by me and averted his face.

I asked him an unsophisticated question.

「Eh? Why are you here? The dungeon expedition still isn’t over yet, right?」

The test was participating in the expedition.

And then the expedition team should be still in the dungeon right now.

Erhart’s shoulders were shaking.

「Could it be that you guys failed and returned? Was there any damage to your party?」

When I looked carefully, the number of Erhart's friends had decreased.

Could it be that something happened in the expedition?

Erhart turned his gaze at the worried me and yelled angrily.

「That's right! We failed there! You're satisfied now?」

I couldn't understand why Erhart suddenly got angry. The Sixth's laughing voice came from inside the Jewel.

『Lyle, be more sensitive. These guys are the only ones that failed.』

The Fifth's attitude was cold toward Erhart's group.

『Perhaps his friends died or ran away—it's good that they learned how reality is so early like this. They survived the experience and now they're having a fresh start doing grunt work.』

—So they either ran away or were sent back in the middle of the expedition?

I didn't realize that.

The way I spoke just now must be rude.

「T-that's—sorry.」

I apologized because I was unable to realize what happened. But then Erhart got teary.

「Are you being sarcastic, you bastard!?」

I got yelled at even though I apologized.

The Fourth was holding back his laughter.

『Lyle—stop making remarks that pour salt on their wounds.』

.

When we started working, Shannon who had gotten used to cleaning the highway within this one month was acting bossy in front of Erhart's group.

「Don't look down on street cleaning! Put your back into it some more when you're scooping up poop! You won't be able to pick the poop with that kind of half-assed posture!」

A girl shouldn't keep saying poop like that.

Shannon demonstrated how to scoop poop in front of Erhart's group.

「Watch this. Scoop it up firmly. It's no good if there is still some poop left on the ground.」

Shannon had become pointlessly skilled in picking up trash. She became angry when she realized Erhart's group wasn't listening seriously.

「Listen seriously!」

Erhart's group looked daunted at Shannon's unruliness and took some distance away from us.

How should I say it, their attitude toward this work was a bit—no, was completely unserious.

「No need to get that worked up just for cleaning.」

「No one is going to do something like this if they can help it.」

「Can’t the time go faster?」

Erhart spoke sarcastically with some irritation in it when he passed me by.

「—So you’ve been doing this kind of thing for one month, huh? You guys are really easygoing.」

Shannon stamped her foot on the ground angrily.

「Haa!? Who are you calling easygoing? You’re the one who should work properly, stu~pid!」

I cleaned the highway while listening to the conversation between the Third and the Fifth inside the Jewel.

『Easygoing eh. They’ve quite the angry attitude there.』

『Lyle provoked them even if it was only unintentionally, after all. Can’t be helped that they got a bit angry.』

『But even discounting that, they look like they’re venting their dissatisfaction on the wrong person though?』

『They’re young, after all. Those kind of people always act disagreeable with their surroundings.』

『Aa~, I know what you mean. The people who will say it’s not their fault but their surrounding’s fault. Even though in the end one has to do their best even if the circumstances are bad.』

『Those guys are really enviable. They don’t get it just how fortunate they are. Even though they almost got erased by that staff member named Marianne.』

『—I wonder about that. That girl didn’t really plan to erase them, did she?』

『There was still a risk of death. It was a fact that she threw them into such a situation. It also didn't look like there was more to what she was doing. A woman who can do something like that so naturally is scary.』

The Fifth was harsh to Marianne-san.

The Sixth grinned suggestively.

『Fifth doesn't understand a woman's heart at all, huh.』

『—I don't want to be told that by you.』

The other ancestors were also showing reaction that said 「You're saying that?」 to the Sixth.

I also felt the same.

Even so, it became a good way to kill time to listen to their conversation while doing work monotonously like this.

『—I understand what everyone wants to say, but if I have to say, I think there is something with that woman.』

I couldn't think of anything if the Sixth spoke vaguely like that.

The Fifth demanded a more detailed explanation from the Sixth's statement.

『And, what is this something?』

『I don't know. But, I got the feeling that she was shouldering something.』

『She only looked carefree to me though? Well, I also got the feeling that she was quite peculiar.』

She was a normal woman who seemed kind.

I didn’t know what to think even if I was told that there was something shady about her.

It was just as the Fifth said, it would be scary if such a kind looking woman was intentionally throwing Erhart’s group into danger.

However, the Sixth trusted his own instinct.

『My instinct is telling me. That she’s a good woman.』

The Seventh snorted after hearing that.

『Then, she is undoubtedly a woman with heavy love. Lyle, be careful. Don’t lay your hand on that woman no matter what happens.』

—Was he thinking that I was an unfaithful man like the Sixth?

That was insulting.

I continued my work quietly. Shannon who had become more diligent compared to the first day was feeling indignation over how unmotivated Erhart’s group was.

「Those guys, they’re just playing around.」

There were a lot of unmotivated adventurers.

The thought that this kind of work was just to earn money for the time being—that it wasn’t something that they would keep doing.

The number of diligent adventurers was few.

I said to Shannon.

「Leave them alone. Just do your work properly rather than minding them. I don’t want to get scolded by the supervisor like what happened on the first day.」

「You think I want that either!?」

Today too, I worked hard cleaning the highway together with Shannon.

.

—Around two weeks after Erhart started the highway cleaning job.

Erhart was called to the guild and talked to Marianne behind the counter.

He could hear talking voices from the other side of the partition. It seemed there were also other people beside them.

Marianne was talking to Erhart with a slightly angry voice.

「Geez, Erhart-kun!」

「Y-yes!」

Marianne started scolding him in a huff that seemed a bit cute.

「I got a complaint from the supervisor that was monitoring the highway cleaning! He said that you guys aren't taking your work seriously.」

Erhart was feeling happy inside that he was able to talk with the older, kind, and beautiful Marianne.

「No, because you know. We hate this kind of plain work.」

He honestly hated the work of cleaning the highway.

He also kept getting odd jobs pushed on him in his hometown and came to hate them.

He couldn't become serious no matter what, because he would be reminded of the past.

Erhart acted spoiled toward Marianne.

「Hey, Marianne-san. Isn't there any cooler work? Like bodyguard quests or monster extermination quest, there's other work right?」

Marianne's eyes narrowed.

「Looks like you haven't learned even after the failure in the dungeon.」

「That's not it! There'll be some monsters if we go out of the wall right? You know, the small fries. If it's against those then even we can fight them.」

Erhart tried appealing that they would be more suited for monster extermination, but Marianne wouldn't listen.

「You guys don't even have any decent equipment. Besides, are you guys properly saving money? Right now all your money is going to your living expenses, right?」

They had no funds with which to buy equipment.

The small reward that they obtained from cleaning the highway vanished upon paying their cheap inn and buying their daily meals.

「That's why, we want to earn more money with bigger quests. At this rate we'll lose hope.」

Marianne looked like she was also considering that.

She sighed.

「I understand where you come from, but the guild's trust party right now isn't even a zero, it's a minus. Even I won't be able to assign work with a nice reward to your party as you are right now.」

「But still」

Marianne seemed like she was yielding and made a suggestion to Erhart.

「Then, if your party will work hard with cleaning the highway, I'll allot a quest with a good reward to you just once.」

「As expected from Marianne-san!」

Erhart rejoiced, but Marianne gave him a warning.

「But, you better resolve yourself for that one chance. If your party fails this too, then even I won't be able to stand up for you all.」

「I-I get it.」

Even Erhart got nervous by Marianne's serious expression.

(But, Marianne-san is still cute even when angry. I'm going to confess to her when I become a fully fledged adventurer.)

Erhart fell in love with the guild staff who was kindly advising his party.

Marianne prepared the paperwork while Erhart was acting bashful from his convenient delusion.

「First you should do the highway cleaning seriously—」

At that time they heard a shocked voice of a staff member from the other side of the partition.

「Eh!? T-this girl is also cleaning the highway!!?」

The two of them looked at each other's face and looked toward the direction from where the voice came from.

They got curious and peeked at the other side. Over there was Lyle and Shannon—and a child with short blond hair.

Lyle was talking to the staff member.

「Yes. This child will also work cleaning the highway from next week.」

The girl who was with them was wearing a peculiar outfit that showed a lot of skin.

The girl herself was looking around with interest at the inside of the guild. It didn't look like she was listening to the talk.

The two other than Lyle, including Shannon, were still little girls.

Erhart thought once more.

(T-this guy, he is even making little children like them work!? Even I wouldn't do something like that!)

From Erhart's perspective, Lyle looked like a greedy adventurer who made even small children work in order to obtain more money—.

(This guy is the worst!)

Chapter 101 – Beim's Dungeon

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—Erhart's group had finished cleaning the highway and were sitting down with tired expressions in front of the gate that acted as an entrance to Beim.

Erhart watched the setting sun as he thought about what's happened so far.

(Three months have passed in the blink of an eye since we came to Beim.)

They came here with hope filling their chests, but in the end, they were shown the difference between dreams and reality.

They couldn't do anything spectacular as adventurers and spent their days cleaning the highway.

Marianne said that she would give them a better quest if they worked seriously, so Erhart also worked hard. But truth be told, he was dissatisfied on the inside.

Erhart's group was sitting on the ground tired, with dirt all over their bodies. People were passing in front of them in order to enter Beim.

The young, dressed-up girls were the kind of city girls that Erhart and his friends were longing for.

It seemed that they were on their way home to Beim.

「Eew. It's smelly.」

「Cleaning highways is work for the adventurers at rock bottom, isn't it?」

「Let's get in quickly.」

The girls laughed scornfully at them and left. Erhart saw them getting further away and clicked his tongue.

「Tsk, so this place is also the same as our village.」

Those girls were the same as the villagers who looked at them with contempt.

Erhart thought that even the city women that he dreamed of weren't different from the village girls after the veneer was taken off.

(But, Marianne-san is wonderful.)

Compared to the girls that had just passed by, Marianne was a very wonderful woman. Erhart affirmed that fact once more after he saw those girls.

They borrowed water outside the gate to wash the dirt off of them. It was then that Lyle and his group walked nearby.

Today, he has Shannon and May with him.

They started washing their hands and feet off near Erhart's group, using the water inside the bucket.

「Today is tiring too.」

Lyle talked to Shannon and May.

「May, don't splash the water like that!」

「Shannon did it first!」

The two little girls were lively even while they were cleaning themselves off. They should be still playing around at that age, and yet Lyle was making them work.

It was something unforgivable from Erhart's point of view.

(This bastard is making children work, even though he is a man!)

The rumors about Lyle were also spreading throughout Beim.

He came to Beim with a harem party, and yet he didn't even take the test and only cleaned the highway. Because of that, he was standing out.

The gossipy adventurers were spreading rumors that Lyle was a 「gigolo」 who made women support him.

In fact, his party members were seen working almost every single day, so it couldn't be helped that such rumors were spreading.

(What's so good about this kind of man?)

Erhart was unable to understand why Lyle's party members would follow someone like this.

A girl came out from the gate while Lyle was helping Shannon and May wash their hands and feet.

She was carrying a basket in her hand.

The one who came was Novem, with her side ponytail fluttering in the wind.The adventurers who had finished working began restlessly whispering to each other when Novem came.

Erhart's friends cursed.

「Shit. Damn showoff」

Novem jogged until where Lyle was and began to take something out of the basket excitedly.

She took out various things like water bottles, snacks, etc.

「Thank you for your hard work today, Lyle-sama!」

However, Lyle seemed dispirited when he saw Novem.

「No, I'm happy that you came to pick us up. But we're still dirty, so we'll head to the bathhouse after this.」

His attitude that made it seem like Novem's arrival was a nuisance rubbed Erhart and the others the wrong way.

(This bastard! What's with that attitude, even though a kind girl is coming here bringing a lot of things for you!)

The water bottles and snacks that Novem brought got snatched up by Shannon and May.

「Thank you Novem. Just as I was feeling really thirsty.」

「I'm hungry~」

Novem panicked.

「Both of you, please leave some for Lyle-sama!」

Lyle laughed seeing Novem so flustered.

「It's fine. It'll be dinner when we get back, anyways. More importantly, we're dirty right now so you shouldn't touch us.」

Novem grabbed Lyle's hand even after he said that.

「No, it's fine. Even though it's dirty, this hand is dirty from hard work. It's not filthy at all.」

It was completely different compared to the other girls before this.

Erhart felt extremely jealous.

(Dammit! Why is a girl this nice with this kind of guy!?)

Lyle and the two girls finished washing themselves and then left to go inside.

And then Erhart heard this conversation as they were walking.

「Lyle-sama, there was a call from the guild.」

「From the guild?」

「Yes. It'll be three months soon, after all.」

He wondered just what it was about.

Erhart was curious, but he immediately lost interest because it was unrelated to them.

(Forget it, I'll go to Marianne-san's place tomorrow. It'll be great if I can bring her some kind of present.)

Erhart eagerly looked forward to tomorrow—.

.

I was called to the guild and a staff member talked to me about from here on.

「Beim's adventurer guild appreciates how hard all of you have worked.」

This staff with a moustache seemed to be in a higher position than that of the other staff.

I was shown into an office that had a sofa in it, instead of the usual receptionist counter.

The staff continued to talk happily.

「Recently, many adventurers are hopeless. They're always picky about the quests they receive. But your party always works diligently no matter what the job is. It's clear that your party can be sufficiently trusted after seeing the diligence in their work. And so this time we wish to ascertain your party's capability.」

I didn't think that we would be able to obtain the guild's trust within just three months, but it seemed they would acknowledge adventurers who worked diligently.

「Our capability?」

The staff looked at me and smiled.

「This too is the way of Beim. We believe that you and your party are more capable than the average adventurers.」

「What should we do?」

When I asked, the staff started talking about a plan for a dungeon expedition.

「We ask that your party start from the surface and go down until floor B20.」

The request was the same as the expedition that was carried out when we just arrived in Beim.

「There was also something like that three months ago, wasn't there?」

「This kind of expedition is routinely held here. The objective is to cull the monsters. If they're left alone the monster's number will quickly increase. That will be troubling.」

「And what will be our role?」

「First your party will be stationed at the center. From there it will depend on the judgment of the person in charge at the site.」

When entering a dungeon, the non-combatants would be gathered at the center of the formation.

Adventurers who could fight would be placed at the front and rear to protect the center.

There would be few chances to play an active role if we got placed in the center.

The staff was looking at me with a testing gaze.

「How about it?」

「I accept.」

The staff looked at me in amusement when I instantly answered like that.

「You're still young and yet you don't look hot-blooded at all. Like this, it looks like you're someone who is overly cautious, but the impression you give is more favorable compared to adventurers who can only talk a big game.」

The Sixth who was listening to this conversation sounded fed-up.

『This guy, he is testing Lyle.』

Testing—the Sixth referred to our stationing at the place where there would be few chances to play an active role.

If I showed dislike and asked to be placed at the front or rear, he surely would grant it.

He was watching to see how I would react.

In other words, the test to ascertain my capability was already starting.

「After all, an adventurer's job isn't just fighting.」

The staff nodded slightly at my answer.

「It seems you really do understand.」

「We have investigated the test using the reference room, after all.」

The staff's expression loosened in delight when he heard that.

Beim's adventurer guild was watching how we were acting in this test.

Would we move as ordered? Did we have the capability?

Were we cooperative?

They would judge all those aspects comprehensively to decide on whether we passed or failed.

Even if we were lacking strength, if we moved as ordered and worked well with other people then we would pass.

Conversely, even if we ignored orders and didn't work well with the surroundings, we would still pass if were strong.

The important thing was whether we would be useful for Beim's adventurer guild or not.

「How reliable. I have great expectations for you.」

The staff said that and stood up from the sofa.

.

I returned to the inn and gathered my companions in order to talk about our plan going forward.

「Looks like the guild wants to see our strength.」

Aria and Sophia were looking happy with sparkling eyes, but their reason for that was horrible.

「So we'll be freed from writing with this then!」

「I'm glad. These three months were really long!」

It seemed that kind of work wasn't suited for them.

Novem was exasperated.

「For the two of you, this will be the main event, won't it?」

Both Aria and Sophia were vigorous frontline fighters.

Swinging around a weapon was easier for them compared to writing letters.

May was tilting her head.

「Humans are amazing. To make use of the dungeon like this. As for us qilin, we want to defeat dungeon as soon as they appear, but Beim's dungeon is a bit impossible I think. It has become too big.」

It seemed that destroying Beim's dungeon that was said to have 100 underground floors was impossible by herself.

Shannon was making a gloomy expression.

「D-dungeon again? I don’t want to spend one month in that kind of dark place.」

In her case, she just didn’t want to work.

Clara told Shannon.

「Sunlight is shining into Beim’s dungeon from the ceiling. The place’s lighting will be dim, but there’ll still be a bit of sunlight there. I also heard that at night, the torches inside the dungeon will be lit with a bluish white flame.」

「Eh? Then it won’t be dark?」

「—The number of the torches will be few, so it’ll be dark at night.」

「That’s no good!」

I got irritated with Shannon who complained a lot, so I also joined the talk.

「You were alright with dark place before, weren’t you?」

「A place swarming with monsters is scary! I’m just a weak girl.」

「Weak? You are?」

Shannon got angry when I ridiculed her with a frivolous laugh. She kicked at me.

Eva clapped her hands when I dodged it.

「Yes, enough already. Let’s return to the topic. Lyle, we’re going to prepare for this, right?」

There was no problem with the preparation itself.

We would be able to obtain things like food or weapons easily in Beim.

The problem was the number of people.

We had ten people including me, but this number wasn't a lot from an adventurer's perspective.

We couldn't bring Damian and Lily-san with us, or rather it would be troublesome if we brought them so they would stay behind.

In the first place, they wouldn't want to participate.

「The only problem is with our number.」

Monica put her hands on her waist and acted big.

「With this Monica at your side, it'll be like you have the strength of a hundred people at your disposal.」

This fellow's work really was worth that much, but it still isn't enough if we only rely on her.

「It'll be great if we can form acquaintances through the quest this time.」

Naturally I also considered hiring people.

I also fixed my eyes on skilled adventurers based on the information that Miranda and Eva gathered.

But, currently we didn't have any achievements in Beim.

If we hired people in this situation and succeeded in the expedition like that, other people would only think that it was thanks to the skilled adventurers that we hired.

That was why we had to take up the challenge with only our own strength.

「We will still keep being unknown in Beim for a while like this.」

Novem nodded.

「Yes, Lyle-sama.」

Now then, let's begin preparing to challenge Beim's dungeon.

.

—At Beim's adventurer guild.

Marianne had prepared a quest with good reward for Erhart.

「Helping out with the dungeon expedition? Could it be we have also been recognized as fully fledged adventurers!?」

Marianne poured cold water at Erhart's happiness.

「Read the details carefully. It's written there that you will be helpers only. Your party will mainly carry the luggage or set up the campsite. Don't try to fight monsters no matter what, okay? This is not a test like before.」

「B-but.」

He thought that it was an adventurer-like work, but then he was depressed because he was immediately told that they wouldn't be counted as fighting power.

Marianne showed a serious expression.

「Erhart-kun—have you forgotten how you almost died in that dungeon?」

「I-I haven't.」

「Then work seriously this time. The adventurers around you will protect you. If you complete this quest successfully, you will be able to gather cheap equipment for your party.」

They could expect quite the amount from the quest this time.

After all, they would be heading to a dangerous place.

Even though they would only be helpers, the money they could obtain in one day would be double the pay from cleaning the highway.

Marianne suggested to Erhart to use the money to gather proper equipment.

「Erhart-kun, first you should gather equipment. You absolutely must prepare weapons and armor that would be the tools of your trade in the future. Do you understand?」

「O-ou!」

Erhart was filled with gratitude to Marianne who was worrying for them.

「After you have gathered proper equipment, you'll be able to go outside and defeat monsters. When your earning increase, you'll also be able to learn various things in Beim's dojos, or a private school.」

「Dojo? Marianne-san, I can teach myself. After all I have three Arts—」

「Erhart-kun.」

Erhart corrected himself when Marianne called his name with a low voice.

「E-err, I can use my Arts until the third stage.」

「Very good. You mustn't say that you have three Arts even by mistake. Because people will think that you have magic tools on you like that.」

Marianne also corrected Erhart's misunderstanding with perseverance.

Erhart's looked at Marianne and his cheeks reddened.

「S-say, Marianne-san. Do you, have someone you like?」

Erhart mustered his courage and tried asking. Then Marianne smiled suggestively and said,

「Now, I wonder about that?」

.

At the plaza in front of Beim's dungeon.

This place was quiet when I tried coming here several times before for a preliminary investigation, but today it had a lot of adventurers gathering here.

Everyone's equipment was all over the place. There wasn't any sense of unity at all in this gathering.

But even among this gathering—we were still standing out as expected.

「What the hell is that!?」

「A carriage that moves without a horse!!」

Albano and Creit were observing from nearby.

Both of them were in their twenties, but they were leaders in charge of their own parties.

Right now they were looking very interested in front of Porter.

Their personality and appearance were the complete opposite from each other, but both of them were adventurers who caught Miranda's eye.

The party that Albano led were the stereotypical adventurers.

They preferred light equipment that was easy to move in and brought with them a set of equipment that would let them play an active role in any kind of situation.

In contrast Creit was leading a group that was wearing full plate—full body armor.

They even brought horses with them. It looked like they had a strong longing toward knights.

They specialized in battle, so their group was thought of as not really useful for other things.

Both of them were born and raised as commoners. Neither of them was formerly a knight or a noble.

It was interesting that these two were leading a party with a completely different style despite that.

I talked to the two of them.

「It's a vehicle that was developed in Arumsaas. I think that it won't be long before it also spreads in Beim.」

I was the one who developed it, but it would be troublesome if I mentioned that so I kept quiet.

Albano knocked the armor plate to check the thickness.

「Arrows won't do anything to this. If we use guns—it'll be useless too I guess.」

It looked like he was thinking of how to deal with it.

Creit warned him.

「Albano! Don't think about how to defeat an ally!」

「We don't know when we're going to become allies or enemies. Even so, this thing looks convenient.」

The person in charge came over while I was calming these two down.

「It's noisy over here.」

Even the two became quiet when that person came.

This person was also mentioned in Miranda's information.

「Good morning. You're Neu Neumann-san, correct?」

He looked at me and smiled when I greeted him.

「How polite. I hope we can work well together.」

This person was an adventurer now, but he was previously a knight.

He lost his employer and drifted over to Beim with his family and became an adventurer—that was written in the document.

He had lived long as an adventurer, but he had a bit of a hang up due to the time when he was a knight.

He was a polite and diligent person.

Albano asked Neu-san.

「Big sis Annette(アネット) isn't participating?」

「She is going home to her birthplace. Her knight order is also in the middle of holiday.」

「I thought it's strange that I'm not seeing her recently…so she really is going home.」

Creit talked to me as those two were chatting.

「Even so, your party, they are really—showy, huh?」

Pointing out that there were only girls in my party in a roundabout way like that must be this person's kindness.

「I wasn't planning to gather only girls, but it already became like this when I noticed.」

「I-I see. But, if that's the case than you better be careful. A party like yours can easily gather resentment from men. Also—that—it'll be a bloodbath among your companions.」

Yeah, it was really dangerous.

There were a lot of dangers, whether from inside or outside.

「I'll be careful.」

Neu-san then spoke to me as we were talking.

「Time to depart.」

.

—Erhart who was participating in the expedition for the second time caught sight of Lyle at the center of the formation.

「That guy is also participating?」

Erhart's group was carrying luggage on their backs while walking beside the wagons.

In contrast, Lyle's party was riding a large vehicle that looked like a metal box with wheels attached.

They were sitting on a moving box that was moving without a horse pulling it while watching the surroundings alertly.

There was a beautiful elf with pretty pink hair next to Lyle.

She has a bow on her back and is attentively watching the surroundings together with Lyle.

The two of them were talking, but he couldn't hear what they were talking about.

Erhart cursed seeing that.

「Keh! That bastard is flirting with women. He thinks this place is a playground.」

To Erhart, Lyle's party looked like they were lacking resolve—.

.

We were participating in the dungeon expedition, but bluntly speaking there was nothing to do.

I was sitting on the ceiling of Porter that was moving slowly and watching the surroundings in alert, but—there was nothing happening.

To begin with, the front and the rear was protecting the center.

It was rare for danger to reach the center.

「Nothing to do.」

The scenery along the way all looked the same. Eva who was on watch together with me was also bored.

「It'll be time for the next shift soon, so endure it until then.」

「There isn't any monster coming out, the traveling speed is also slow, it's really boring.」

Eva was complaining a lot, but her eyes didn't let their guard down even then.

Even so, this dungeon was really strange.

There was a really large hole opened up in the ground. Then, there's a spiraling path that goes along the wall.

Dilapidated houses were lined up on the path. This place looked like a destroyed city.

We were going down the path slowly, but it only looked like we were walking along the same path.

Light was shining in from the ceiling—the surface, but just how did that work? The slant of the path was also gentle.

The Third spoke his opinion leisurely from inside the Jewel.

『It'll also be nice if we can be led until floor B20 without anything happening like this, though. After all, you'll be able to start from there the next time you come here.』

An expedition party was dispatched routinely in order to decrease the increasing number of monsters.

After we advanced until floor B20, the next time we would be able to start exploring the dungeon from there but—it would be pointless if we didn't receive permission to enter the dungeon.

「It will be best if things continue peacefully like this and we pass the test.」

Eva disliked my statement.

「I think more surprise and drama are needed in life. I hope there'll be some kind of serious incident that happens.」

「I'd prefer it if nothing happens, though.」

The expedition party slowly advanced like that and the sunlight was gradually weakening. When it became dark, the torches on the dilapidated houses were lit with a bluish white fire.

Neu-san who was riding a horse came nearby and raised his voice to the surrounding.

「We'll stop here today! Start preparing the campsite!」

.

The activity of the expedition party was plain.

There were also adventurers who were playing an active role spectacularly at the front and rear, but we at the center also had a lot of plain work to do in regards to supporting them.

「Shannon, I said more to the right. That's the left.」

「Haa? This is the right from your position!」

Shanon and I were preparing food—not, instead we were lining up simple tables and benches.

A lot of benches were needed with how many people are here.

The food had to be prepared before the adventurers gathered here.

Well, we wouldn't be the ones cooking, so we were only helping out the surroundings.

After we finished lining up the tables and benches, Shannon made a tired face.

「We've only been doing this kind of thing for two hours already. I've had enough. I want to go home~」

I flicked Shannon's forehead because she was complaining.

「There are still two weeks left. Just be patient for a bit more.」

「There is nothing to do for us here mon. Let's just go down quickly to the floor B20.」

「If only we could do that—hm?」

While we were making stupid talk, I saw adventurers running to the campsite in a panic.

「T-trouble! A subspecies came out!」

An adventurer who was running out of breath and drenched in sweat went around telling the noncombatants to run from the campsite.

「My comrades are holding it back. Run away quickly while you can!」

The expedition party fell into chaos when they heard a subspecies appeared near the campsite.

Shannon hid behind me while clutching my clothes.

「W-what!? What is this subspecies thing!?」

A subspecies was a monster that had experienced "Growth" and became stronger.

Growth was the blessing of goddess. Because of that, people thought that monsters wouldn't be given that blessing.

And so no one was openly saying that monsters could also go through Growth.

That was why they were called subspecies.

「A subspecies is a normal monster that grows stronger. It's troublesome because the way it grows strong is random, so we won't be able to prepare any countermeasure beforehand I guess?」

「That's dangerous isn't it!? Then why are you that carefree!? Or rather, are you looking happy!?」

When the ancestors taught me about the subspecies, all seven of them were still in the Jewel.

The annoying First and the diligent Second were also there at that time. I remembered that the atmosphere was even livelier than now.

Looked like my feelings showed on my face when I recalled that time.

「No, I'm just getting a bit nostalgic about the time I was like you. Some people had to tell me about it.」

I didn't know how strong the monster had become, so I wouldn't be able to prepare before challenging the subspecies.

I wanted to watch how the adventurers of Beim would act, but on the other hand I was also rejoicing inside because a chance had come.

I looked toward the direction of the commotion and lightly tapped Shannon's back.

「The commotion is over there. You head to Porter right away. Gather everyone.」

Shannon looked at me with an uneasy expression.

「Haa!? You're going to remain here alone!?」

「It's fine, just go.」

I forcefully pushed Shannon's back and she ran to where Porter was parked.

I walked among the helpers who were running around in confusion.

I intentionally walked against the flow of people and clenched the Jewel with my right hand.

The map of the surroundings clearly formed inside my head. It showed the adventurers who were fighting the monster as light dots.

It looked like they were surrounding the monster and fighting it as a group.

「They have nice movement.」

This party was different from all the other parties I had seen until now. It was a gathering of skilled people and the damage they received was small.

But, the subspecies was also leading a swarm of monsters. It seemed the party was in a difficult battle against them.

The ancestors inside the Jewel were rejoicing.

『Oh? A bigger chance than I expected is here. Even though I thought that at most Lyle will only get a chance in the latter half.』

The Third was easygoing.

The Fourth was exasperated by such Third, but he was also thinking that this was a chance.

『It's too bad that it caused a great commotion though. But, it's not so bad if we think of it as a chance for Lyle to shine.』

The Fifth was apparently observing the people who were running away in a panic.

『It helps that they're running away quickly.』

It would be hard to fight while protecting them, so it helped that they were running away.

The adventurers were guiding the people who were escaping. They had no leeway to pay attention to me who was going against the flow of the crowd alone.

The Sixth confirmed the position of the enemy with the map I was using while thinking of how I should act.

『Fumu, first, I want to see the enemy's appearance. Lyle, let's observe the enemy from the rooftop.』

The Seventh was worried about something.

It seemed it wasn't me that he was worried about.

『The achievement will be stolen if Lyle doesn't defeat the monster quickly. Lyle, hurry.』

The flow of people was endless. I couldn't see the front at all, so I started running and looked at the nearby rooftop.

I used a crumbling fence as a foothold and leaped up. I sprinted and lept from rooftop to rooftop while heading to where the enemy was.

Many of the buildings were one-story houses, but there were also two-storied and three-storied buildings.

I ran up the nearby tallest building and looked at the place where the enemy was from there.

It seemed they had a flashy battle there. Smoke was rising from that place.

I could see the figure of a monster advancing while destroying buildings.

Its upper body was similar to a human. It had pale skin and a bald head. Its red eyes were wide.

「Is that Centaur?」

It was bigger than a one-story house. Its lower body that I caught glimpses of from the gaps of the buildings was a cow or—a horse.

The adventurers were climbing on the rooftop and attacked from a distance against such a monster.

They were forced into a hard fight against the huge monster, but even so they were fighting well.

It would take time but, it looked like there wouldn't be any problem even if I left them alone.

『Hmph! —Not bad.』

The Seventh muttered in annoyance. It was because he hated adventurers.

However, he had to recognize them if they were capable.

He was irritated because of that.

「It looks like there won't be any problem even if we just watch like this. Well, the problem is behind that thing I guess?」

I was only watching the huge subspecies monster, but the swarm of monsters that thing was leading was also troublesome.

Its number was many and the adventurers had a hard time defeating them.

There was some magic casted. A flame pillar appeared from some distance away, and then there was an explosion immediately.

「They're flashy.」

I unconsciously let my impression slip out.

Miranda arrived while I was watching the situation.

Miranda was riding on the back of a golem that she created from soil. Aria and Sophia were riding behind Miranda.

Aria and Sophia got down from the golem and asked me about the situation.

「How's it going!?」

Sophia chided the excited Aria.

「Please calm down, Aria! Lyle-dono, how's the damage?」

Miranda was watching the battle silently, but she looked like she was listening carefully to me.

I explained the situation to the three.

「A troublesome subspecies came out, but the real problem is the enemies' number. At this rate the swarm of monster will penetrate all the way into the campsite.」

Aria reassured me with her spear leaning on her shoulder.

「There is no problem with the campsite. Because almost everyone has run away.」

「The people, that is. But it'll still be a bit troubling.」

People had already escaped—but the campsite had the important supplies of the expedition party.

If it was ransacked then this expedition would end in failure.

We would have no choice but to return to the surface.

I didn't know what kind of decision the guild would make, but I wanted to avoid such a result.

Miranda turned her gaze to me.

「—And, what're we going to do?」

I looked at the fighting adventurers while folding my arms and thought.

If we joined the fight here without permission, there would also be some people who wouldn't be amused.

But, this was the best chance to promote our strength.

I clutched the Jewel once. The Third told me with his usual tone.

『Do as you like. Lyle is free to do anything.』

I let go of the Jewel and told the three.

「I want to join the battle as flashily as I can, so you three fight conspicuously. As for me…I'll defeat that troublesome subspecies first, I guess.」

The control would be difficult, but if I aimed well then even a subspecies would only take one hit to defeat.

This was a rare chance.

Let’s do it flashily.

Chapter 102 – Prospective Rookie

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—Sounds of battle could be heard from everywhere.

The sound of buildings crumbling. The sound of magic firing.

Adventurers were fighting monsters. One could easily hear the dinn of metal clashing and screams in the air.

In such a place, Erhart, who was late to escape—was hiding in a building as he held his breath.

「How did it turn out like this!?」

This battle against the monsters had begun just as he was starting to get fed up doing support work every day.

Even so, since he had promised Marianne, he didn't even give a thought towards joining the battle

But—he got interested in how the other adventurers were fighting.

He accepted work delivering items from the center to the front hoping to be able to get a peek of the frontline.

He thought that he would be able to take the opportunity to peek at the adventurers battling while he was delivering the items.

His friends weren't as enthused, so he left them behind, but there were also other adventurers on guard duty escorting his group so he wasn't that worried.

He was just carrying baggage. There wouldn't be any problems.

There shouldn't be any need to fight or worry about anything.

And yet.

The dilapidated building he ran into was shaking each time the huge monster took a step. Sand and dust were falling from the ceiling.

It wouldn't be strange for the ceiling to collapse at any moment, but he was scared and couldn't run outside.

He approached the window fearfully and peeked outside. There, a huge monster that he had never seen before was swinging around a giant club.

The club, swung down on an escaping adventurer, crushed a single building with sheer brute force

(How the hell do you defeat something like that!)

That kind of monster existed? In the first place, could it be defeated?

The trembling Erhart continued watching like that, but then something shiny hit the subspecies's head and pierced through.

It happened in an instant. After that the monster immediately stopped moving—and its head burst open.

Flesh and blood scattered to the surrounding. The monster slowly tilted after losing its head.

It fell and crushed two buildings with it. It then ceased moving.

「—Eh?」

Erhart was unable to understand just what happened just now.

The fighting adventurers were also the same.

「Is that magic!?」

「Who the hell did that!?」

「It doesn’t matter. We’re taking care of the other monsters now!」

With the powerful enemy defeated, the adventurers’ morale was rising.

Erhart went out from inside the house and looked around. Then, he saw a man standing on the tallest nearby building with a bow raised at the ready.

—It was Lyle.

「T-that guy did this!?」

Before long the silver bow somehow vanished. Then, he straddled a living thing near him that could be mistaken for as a monster and headed this way.

「W-what in the world. Just what in the world」

Erhart fell on his butt in fear toward the approaching Lyle and held his head in his hands. Then he heard a woman’s voice.

「Were you late in escaping? Good grief—」

When he lifted his face, Lyle jumped off the monster’s back with saber in hand and ran toward Erhart.

「D-DON’T COMEEEEE!」

The face of Lyle right now was like a completely different person from the Lyle with whom he picked a fight with at the guild.

It was his eyes. His eyes were scary. The Lyle that he usually looked down on couldn’t be found there.

Lyle headed toward Erhart and pointed the tip of his saber—

「Keep crouching down like that!」

—He gave a short yell and jumped over Erhart.

Erhart kept his head down for a while before he fearfully raised his head and looked toward Lyle.

Then he saw Lyle standing there—having defeated a monster called orc that was even bigger than Erhart.

He was wiping the blood staining his saber.

「Eh? H-huh?」

An orc was approaching Erhart without him even noticing.

Miranda approached Lyle and held out her hand from the monster that she was riding.

Lyle grabbed that hand and got on the monster that looked something like a tiger.

「Where should I bring you to next?」

「You can keep going through this path. Also, the person over there.」

Lyle called out to Erhart.

It seemed he didn't notice that he was talking to Erhart.

「You'll be able to see the campsite if you follow this path. You better run till there quickly. Miranda, hurry.」

Lyle rode behind Miranda and put his hands around her waist.

「Good grief, how hectic.」

After Lyle and Miranda left, Erhart was tormented by a sense of humiliation that he had never felt until now.

.

I ran around the battlefield on the back of the golem that Miranda created.

The golem's movement leaping from roof to roof was very violent..

I was hugging Miranda's back because there was no other place to hold. This was a really pathetic appearance.

「Hey, create some handrails on this golem. You can make something like that, right?」

I complained to Miranda, but she replied with a smile.

「Lyle won't hug me if I made something like that. That'd be lonely.」

It might be fine for Miranda, but it was embarrassing for me to let other people see me hugging a girl on the battlefield.

「It's alright now. I'm jumping down.」

It wasn't like I got down because I had enough. It was because we had arrived.

Miranda looked a bit disappointed when I let go.

「I'll head to another place. Lyle, don't do anything too reckless.」

「You too.」

I landed and drew out my saber to cut down the monsters around me.

The other adventurers who were fighting the monsters showed expressions of relief with my entrance.

There was even one person who whistled.

「Oi oi, don’t show off at the battlefield.」

The adventurer who said that to me went behind me so that we stood back to back.

It was a stance used to protect each other’s backs.

「I’m sorry that I’m late. Actually, this is my first time entering the dungeon of Beim.」

The man seemed to understand just from that.

「You’re a rookie who came from another place? But, you’re a big help.」

The adventurer was using a spear. He skewered a monster that leaped at him.

I also slashed the enemy in front of me.

「How’s the situation?」

「—We won’t lose, but the odds are a bit bad. If these guys ransacked the campsite, we’ll have to retreat. In that case, our rewards will decrease.」

It was just as I thought.

「That’ll be troubling. I want to pass the test this time, so I’ll help out here even if I have to be a bit reckless.」

「Liar! A guy like you is surely rejoicing right now that a chance finally came your way. Good grief, this is why the strong guys are troublesome.」

It seemed that other than me there were also a lot of people who had the same thinking.

I bisected one of the advancing monsters with the sabers that I held in both hands. The other adventurers who saw that were surprised.

「It's my first time seeing someone fighting using a saber in that way.」

「Thanks.」

It seemed the adventurers around here managed to calm down somewhat with my reinforcement.

The situation wasn't bad.

After this place had rallied, a monster burst through a building.

It was a very large bull monster. On its back—there was Albano.

He was grabbing the monster's horn with two hands so he wouldn't get shaken off.

When I looked closer, there were swords and spears stabbed into the monster's body.

「Y-you! This guy, it's rampaging!」

Albano was fighting hard so that he wouldn't get shaken off from the rampaging bull. Then one more person rushed out from the broken wall.

It was Creit.

「How flashy.」

I unconsciously muttered.

Creit was riding a horse with a spear in hand. He charged at the bull and stabbed the monster's vital point with his spear.

The rampaging monster vomited blood and fell. Then, Albano fell on the ground and rolled.

He crashed on a wall and came to a stop, and then Creit got down from his horse.

Albano was laughing flippantly, so it looked like he wasn't injured.

「Thanks for the help, Creit.」

Creit lent a hand to Albano and helped him stand up. Then, he punched Albano's face.

The surrounding adventurers held him back.

「Oi, what are you doing!」

「You two, don't fight at this kind of time!」

「Someone hold down this guy!」

Then Creit, who was held in place by three people, opened his helmet's faceplate and yelled angrily.

「Don't screw around, Albano! You're always getting in the way of other people!」

It seemed something happened.

Albano was also irritated.

「That was because you guys were too slow. How about you at least thank us, huh, you pretend knight?!」

「Pretend you say? How dare you!」

The surrounding adventurers desperately tried to stop the two's quarrel.

The adventurer who guarded my back thrust his spear on the ground and talked while still keeping alert to the surroundings.

「Albano and Creit are always like this. The two of them are really capable, but they're like water and oil. They always get into a fight with each other.」

「Looks like it.」

It was troubling that they were quarreling in this kind of situation.

Neu-san arrived riding a horse at that time.

「You two again.」

Even Albano and Creit became meek in front of Neu-san.

「B-boss. This isn't what you think. It was that bastard Creit」

「A-Albano, you cheater! Neu-dono, this is a misunderstanding. It was Albano!」

Ne-san roared in front of the two who were making excuses.

「Think about the situation! Clean this place upe and head to the other places right away!」

The adventurer who was talking with me praised Neu-san.

「As expected from a former knight. He is really reliable.」

Neu-san looked around and called out to the adventurers here.

「Those who are free, go reinforce the others right away! The other places are getting pushed back by the swarm.」

He said that and made his horse run to another place.

I got the feeling that he was looking at me when he passed by me, but he didn’t say anything.

Creit closed the faceplate of his helmet and got on his horse. He was about to go to join his comrades.

Then Albano also got on behind him right away.

「Albano, get down!」

「Bring me too if you’re going back. You don’t want to get scolded by boss Neu more than this right?」

「Kuh!」

After the two left this place, I also headed to the next area.

.

—Sophia was facing the swarm of monsters that kept advancing with a battle axe in hand.

Sophia was rampaging alone in the middle of the monster swarm.

The surrounding adventurers were going pale seeing her swinging around her battle axe and defeating the monsters.

「What’s that woman!?」

「Is that a new kind of amazon!?」

「Even though she’s cute, it’s no good!」

Blood sprayed each time she swung her battle axe. Because of that, Sophia was dyed in a blood-red color.

Monsters were attacking Sophia from all directions.

Sophia judged that it would be troublesome if they came at her simultaneously. She lightened her weight and crouched, and then she jumped up.

The monsters that leapt at her crashed into their fellow monsters.

Sophia had jumped really high in the air.

When she looked around from that high, the others were also fighting.

When she looked at Aria, she saw her rampaging about even more than she was.

Blood spray spurted up in the air one after another. She could hear the sound of adventurers there rejoicing.

At another place, Miranda was using three golems to defeat monsters one after another.

「Everyone is amazing.」

She mustn't lose. Sophia looked at the ground.

Her air time became longer due to her lightened weight. The monsters and adventurers were also looking up at her in surprise.

「There are many. Then!」

Sophia took out some pebbles that she had gathered beforehand from her pocket with one hand and increased their weight before throwing them to the ground.

The pebbles with their weight increased possessed incredible power, and in addition they were also thrown from above.

Most of the monsters died instantly when they were hit.

Sophia landed on the ground when the number of monsters had been reduced significantly from that. Then, she held her axe at the ready again.

「Now, come at me!」

The adventurers who saw how she fought cheered for Sophia—.

.

—The center of the expedition party.

Porter was stationed there. Eva was lying in wait for the enemies that managed to go past Lyle and others.

There was smoke rising from here and there. It seemed Lyle and the others were rampaging flashily over there.

Eva was watching that from above Porter and let out a voice of admiration.

「Aria and Sophia are also rampaging.」

Perhaps their stress had been accumulating because they hadn't been able to let off any steam recently.

Eva who was thinking that turned her face toward May. who was looking bored.

「Are you sulking?」

May also wanted to fight, but Miranda stopped her.

「Even though I also want to rampage!」

May looked dissatisfied. Eva tried persuading her to restrain herself.

「We're going to attract too much attention if you get serious here. You should protect me here instead. I can fight, but my main occupation is a singer.」

Eva could also fight, but her main duty lies in other things.

She wasn't pursuing strength like Aria and Sophia.

At best, she was thinking that it would be enough if she was able to protect herself.

「Elves have really liked tales and songs since way back when, don't they? I think that you will surely become strong if you train seriously though?」

「Unfortunately, I don't need any more strength than necessary. What I'm looking for is strength as a singer. I'll leave the battles to Aria and Sophia.」

May turned her gaze to the places where smoke was rising conspicuously.

Aria was rampaging there.

「Those two are amazing for humans. Perhaps they'll immediately surpass Miranda in pure strength soon.」

The two of them were specialized for fighting, compared to Miranda, who was an all-purpose type.

It was only natural that they were powerful.

In the first place, those two would train when they had the time.

「Miranda is a different type after all. She can't do the same thing as those two, but I think it's fine like that.」

But, those two couldn't perform like Miranda.

Eva next turned her gaze to the simple beds that were placed near Porter.

The wounded adventurers were brought here.

Novem was in charge of healing—with Shannon as her helper.

Monica was also helping while muttering complaints.

「Why do I have to stay behind? Even though I want to give battle support beside chicken dickwad.」

Monica, who looked like she was screwing around in the dungeon by wearing a maid uniform, was actually really strong.

And then, she was also an important existence that was supporting the party.

She managed all the support for their daily life. She was someone that they were thankful to have.

Shannon was requested by Novem and helped out with various things.

「Shannon-chan, please prepare a new bandage.」

「Again!? Even though I had brought one just now…」

Eva saw each member carrying out their respective duty and made a joyful face.

May was puzzled seeing that.

「Is there something that pleases you?」

「I guess. Do you understand that this party is really an excellent one? The members are gorgeous and also skilled as the hero's

comrades. That's a great thing. Perhaps I'll turn the event this time into a song or a tale too?」

She would sing a tale with Lyle as the main character.

Eva joined this party for that. She felt proud for her comrades who had grown stronger than before.

.

The surroundings became dark after the battle was over.

Light sources like torches and lanterns were gathered and Neu-san assembled the important people. His expression was conflicted.

「The number of injured is higher than expected.」

Neu-san discussed it with the other expedition leaders.

「Actual deaths are quite few, but our number will become insufficient if we send back the injured.」

「We are unlucky that a subspecies came out.」

「Should we ask the guild to send a new party?」

The party leaders were watching that discussion.

The party leaders were also gathered here. Albano came to my side and greeted me in an overly-familiar way.

「Yo, Lyle. I heard about your party's achievement. Looks like you guys were rampaging flashily.」

「They're really reliable comrades.」

Albano laughed in response to my reply.

「You're really something for being able to say that when you're surrounded by such scary women. —And, here is the main question. How about you join up with me?」

「Join up?」

What kind of proposal was this? Creit came while I was thinking that.

「Lyle-kun, you better be careful. It'll be a disaster if you join up with Albano.」

「Creit, you asshole!」

Neu-san looked our way when the two of them were going to start quarreling.

The two noticed that and lowered their voices.

「Lyle, even if I said join up it'll be for this expedition only. Your party can also heal injuries, right? We also can do various things but, when it comes to injuries we can only give first aid. We'll also be able to be a bit reckless if you guys are with us.」

It looked like Albano's aim was Novem's healing magic.

I got a favorable impression of him because he wasn't trying to poach Novem but asking us to work together.

But—.

「What'll be in it for me?」

—It didn't give me anything.

The ancestors inside the Jewel—especially the Sixth, were pleased when they heard my reply.

『So now you've become able to negotiate too, Lyle? Huh. I'm happy.』

Albano made a slightly weak expression when I asked what would be in it for me.

「You're tough even though you look like a green young master.」

Although he said that, he looked a bit happy that I was responding to the negotiation.

「—It has only been three months since you came to Beim right? Then there's still many things that you don't know correct?」

「I'm also investigating many things about that together with my companions.」

「Of course you are. You don't look like you have any opening. But, you'll be able to save some effort if you ask me directly as someone who is active in Beim.」

So he suggested giving us information in exchange for our cooperation.

It wasn't bad. It would only be for just this time, and we wanted information above all else right now.

Then Creit also joined our talk.

「Then, I'll also offer you information. In exchange, I want your party to give us healing when we get injured.」

「Creit, I was the one who asked first.」

「It's not like you're asking him to work exclusively with you. Lyle-kun can decide this by himself.」

Neu-san was finished with the discussion and came here just when it looked like these two were going to quarrel again.

The two of them shut up.

「Lyle-kun, I heard about your party's achievement. If possible, I want your party to work together with us from tomorrow.」

The invitation came just as expected.

「I don't mind. After all, that's just what we want.」

Neu-san smiled wryly.

「Good grief—you're really reliable for your age. You're also composed. Albano, Creit, how about you two learn from him a little?」

The two looked uncomfortable being told that.

.

—Erhart was peeking at the discussion of the adventurers from a hiding place.

The adventurers who wouldn't even give him the time of day before were talking pleasantly with Lyle. Not only that, even Neu who was a top brass leading this expedition was also recognizing Lyle.

Erhart clenched his fist miserably.

「Why?」

He thought that Lyle was just a spoiled kid who could do nothing except hide behind women.

But, he understood after watching Lyle fight.

That Lyle was far stronger than the likes of him.

When he thought of the reason, he arrived at one answer.

It was the talent that he was born with.

Erhart was feeling a sense of extreme jealousy and envy towards Lyle……

.

—Around that time.

Sophia and the others who were waiting for Lyle's return were finishing their camping preparation inside one of the dilapidated houses that looked suitable.

They chose a building that looked in relatively good condition and rested there. It was a method that was unique to Beim's dungeon.

Sophia was washing her body with the hot water inside a large tub that Clara prepared for the party.

She relied on the light of the lantern inside the room to wash off the filth on her body before sitting inside the tub and warmed herself.

「It's nice to be inside a house, even if it's a dilapidated one like this.」

Generally, she would be exposed to her comrade's gazes when washing her body inside a dungeon.

That was because it would be dangerous to act separately from comrades when inside a dungeon.

Even now, Clara was sitting on a wooden box while reading a book on the other side of the room's door.

But, this place was nice because it had walls and she didn't need to be concerned by anyone's gaze.

When she looked outside from the window with a cracked glass, it was dark and she couldn't see anything.

「Lyle-dono still hasn't returned.」

Quite some time had passed since the battle was over, but Lyle still hadn't returned.

Miranda too had immediately gone somewhere right after she washed her body.

She was talking to herself, but Clara politely replied.

「Lyle-san is in the middle of a meeting with the important members of the expedition party. The party has received some damage from the battle this time. Perhaps it's taking this long because they have to deal with that too?」

Sophia was impressed with Lyle.

Because he was also participating in the discussion for the plan going ahead even though he must be tired from the battle.

Sophia was already exhausted and she didn't want to join any difficult talk if possible.

「Lyle-dono is also amazing. Even though he was unreliable not too long ago, he is mingling with the adults and having discussions with them right now.」

She became acquainted with Lyle more than a year ago. Compared to that time, Lyle had changed a lot. The unreliable youth had become a splendid leader now.

Clara also agreed.

「He certainly has become really reliable. Perhaps it's because he has found a clear objective inside himself? He is also working hard. Though only a few people noticed that.」

Lye had worked even harder than before after he decided to defeat Celes.

It wasn't just with training, he was also thinking hard about what would be needed for the future.

Sophia thought that it was amazing.

(Even though I can only swing around my axe, he is also thinking about managing the party and the plan for the future—he's really amazing.)

However, Clara continued with a regretful tone.

「Lyle-san's evaluation is low since we came to Beim after all. I hope his reputation can be restored somehow through this expedition.」

「Eh? Is that true!?」

Sophia was surprised hearing that Lyle's reputation was bad,

She was puzzled why Lyle wasn't recognized even though he was working that hard.

「You didn't know? He's famous in the guild. After all, he's the only man in a party filled with girls, so he's standing out no matter what. Besides, we have been doing nothing but simple quests since coming to Beim. The foulmouthed people even call Lyle-san a "gigolo bastard".」

「What's with that!」

Sophia's face went red in anger. She stood up from the tub and brought her face out of the door to question Clara. Her large breasts were pushed in front of Clara's eyes.

Clara narrowed her eyes slightly more than usual and said to Clara.

「It's useless even if you complain to me. In the first place, we haven't done anything noteworthy in Beim, so it can't be helped that our party's evaluation is low. There are a lot of slanders because we're standing out in a bad way no matter what.」

「That's not good! Lyle-dono is working hard. He trained from early in the morning and thought about a lot of things until late at night. And yet, how could he be called a gigolo bastard despite that!?」

Clara told Sophia to towel her body and then she explained that it couldn't be helped.

「People cannot see effort with their own eyes. That's why I'm hoping that their evaluation will change slightly with the battle this time.」

Sophia felt depressed.

「Y-you're right. It's pointless even if I'm saying this to Clara-san.」

Those who were close to Lyle understood well how hard he worked.

But, he must look easygoing from the perspective of outsiders.

Normally skilled people would immediately take the test and start doing adventurer activity.

Lyle didn't do that. So it couldn't be helped that he was underestimated.

Clara continued with a slightly happier tone.

「But, I’m looking forward to tomorrow.」

「Y-you’re right! The evaluation on Lyle-dono will surely be corrected starting tomorrow!」

Sophia was relieved to hear that.

Chapter 103 – The Big Names

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Our role changed starting the day after.

Until yesterday, we were placed at the center to help out there as well as for guarding the non-combatants.

But, from today on we were recognized as capable fighting strength and placed at the front line.

As we traveled, we were walking around the Porter as we stayed alert to the surroundings.

Until now, we had been passing through areas that were already cleared, but it would be different from now on.

Aria and Eva were staying vigilant toward the surroundings.

I myself was clutching my Jewel while probing the surrounding area.

—I knew that we would enter a battle with a group of monsters if we kept advancing like this.

But, this was also an experience.

I didn't tell Aria and Eva about my discovery.

Eva was especially wary, watching the surroundings from the Porter's ceiling for monsters lying in wait on the rooftops.

Aria was walking on the ground as she stayed alert, especially of the monsters possibly hiding within buildings.

「It's unpleasant with how many hiding places there are here.」

There were many dilapidated houses lined up here, so there wouldn't be any difficulty in finding a hiding place.

It would be troublesome if there was something lurking there.

I could see the enemies' location, but my companions couldn't do the same.

Shannon complained that it was unfair, but Aria said 「It'll become a nice practice」 and accepted it.

She had become reliable.

Novem was approaching me.

「Lyle-sama, you came back late last night, so how about resting inside Porter?」

I said thanks to Novem who was being considerate to me.

「Thank you. But there's no problem, I'm only walking.」

「You'd normally be tired from the constant vigilance you need to keep up, though..」

In fact, Aria was starting to tire mentally.

She frequently took a break to rest her mind, but it was painful that we lacked manpower that could be used as Aria's substitute.

「I want to increase our number some more, but I wonder if our reputation has increased a bit from the case this time?」

It would be easier to recruit party members if we had a reputation.

After all, anyone would want to join an influential group because of it being more profitable that way.

「There will also be people who approach us with the intention of making use of us, in that case. Lyle-sama, please be careful.」

「That will be problematic too—」

Even the Sixth's Arts wasn't omnipotent.

It wouldn't react to someone who was trying to use us.

But it could see through those who tried to trick us. What was important was whether they had hostility or not.

Aria stopped walking as we were talking and stretched her hand to the side.

Everyone stopped moving and took their weapons. Aria then slowly picked up a small stone on the ground—and threw it into one of the houses.

Then the monsters who realized that they had been detected crawled out from the house.

I applauded Aria.

「Great job noticing them.」

Aria turned around in exasperation at my praise.

「They werern't that hard to detect. Forget about it, don't just watch, help out some.」

The monsters were goblins—no, they were hobgoblins, a bigger type of goblin.

They were about as big as humans and smarter than goblins.

They could use tools deftly, and they were also stronger than humans.

They were plainly troublesome monsters. The guild's data mentioned how they often hid inside a building to ambush adventurers like this.

Novem stepped forward when I was about to unsheathe my saber.

Her hands were holding her silver staff and she fired magic toward the monsters.

「Wind—Cannon.」

Wind gathered at the tip of Novem's staff and produced a flow of wind at the surrounding.

The wind immediately grew stronger and flowed irregularly.

The hobgoblins who were hit by the magic got sent flying by the unseen wind.

The monsters crashed on the ground and walls. They didn't get back up again.

「Only one hit, huh?」

I spoke in admiration. Novem then turned around toward me.

「There is no need for Lyle-sama to bother yourself with monsters of this level.」

Certainly they weren't a hard opponent, but it still made me feel awkward to not do anything just because of that.

There was one more person who didn't realize how I was feeling.

—It was Shannon.

「Ee~, that makes him like a gigolo if he doesn't do anything. Or rather, it's that he genuinely is a gigolo, isn't he?」

Gigolo—she must be saying it in the meaning of a man who was making a woman work in order to provide financially for him.

I wasn't anything like that, but I also knew that there were people thinking that I was like that.

But, I was working, so I wasn't a gigolo.

I pinched Shannon's cheek with my fingertips.

「You're calling me a gigolo? You're working even less than me, you can't call me something like that.」

「Ehen I ham horhing~」

She must be saying *Even I am working*, but I myself was working.

「Do you understand that if you're treating me like a gigolo even though I'm working the same amount as you, then you're just the same as me?」

Sophia was exasperated seeing me arguing with Shannon.

「Both of you, enough with the quarrel already.」

Aria went around checking whether the monsters had really died or not while Eva was staying alert to the surroundings.

May was sleeping inside Porter while Clara was driving.

Novem was looking flustered while Miranda was watching us and laughing.

「Lyle-sama isn't a gigolo. It's just that Lyle-sama mustn't get bothered by small fries like this—」

「Oh? I'll be fine even if Lyle is like that you know? Lyle, just say it if you want to become a gigolo at any time. I'll provide for you then.」

Miranda teased that she wouldn’t mind taking care of me, but there was a fellow who was taking it seriously.

「Gigolo—what a wonderful word! As expected, it’s chicken dickwad who is worthy to be this Monica’s master. I will take care of everything from morning until night without chicken dickwad needing to do anything.」

Both Shannon and I were creeped out seeing Monica genuinely rejoicing.

Novem was also making a seriously angry face.

She became expressionless and began to scold Monica dispassionately.

「I’ll be troubled if you pamper Lyle-sama too much. In the first place, it’s also a kindness to sometimes be strict for Lyle-sama’s own good. Your help will only make humans fall into depravity.」

Monica talked back to Novem with a smile.

「Depravity is fine! The meaning of my existence is to be of service to humans. A gigolo bastard chicken dickwad who doesn’t feel like doing anything by himself will be the ideal master to serve. I won’t mind at all even if he’s a lowlife who can’t do anything as a human! Aa~, gigolo—what a wonderful concept! When I imagined chicken dickwad who can’t do anything without me serving him—ah, I can’t, I’m drooling.」

Both Shannon and I calmed down after seeing Monica say that with serious eyes.

I swore in my heart.

「I'll fight next.」

Shannon was also the same.

Something must be in her mind.

「I'll also work harder. I'm going inside Porter to study.」

「Work hard~」

I sent her off with a wave of my hand. Monica got seriously panicked seeing that.

「Why are you getting motivated!? Even though this Monica will take care of everything for you!」

「If I'm going to be treated as a gigolo from you taking care of me, then I'll do my best to work hard.」

Novem smiled at my statement.

「As expected from Lyle-sama. It's important to have such feelings.」

It seemed her joke-like exchange with Monica just now was actually serious.

And then, Monica was also similarly serious.

「No waay~!!」

I looked away from Monica, who was disappointed from the bottom of her heart, and clutched the Jewel.

A 3D map of the area was displayed inside my head.

I understood where the enemies were hiding very clearly.

「—This way.」

I relieved Aria and walked at the front. My party members were following me.

Aria sighed seeing the defeated monsters.

「It feels unpleasant leaving behind magic stones and materials without collecting them. It doesn't feel like we're earning anything.」

Sophia also felt the same. She was looking at the defeated monsters.

「It seems the supporters behind will collect them later, but it still feels like a waste to me.」

Dismantling magic stones and material from the monsters we defeated was in our line of work.

It seemed they couldn't calm down about leaving the monsters here, but kept walking.

Was this what people called an occupational disease?

No one would be able to guess that just a year ago they would feel disgusted about dismantling monsters for their magic stones and materials.

.

—There was a man who was observing Lyle's party.

It was Albano.

He was sneakily following behind Lyle's party and watching their situation.

「That guy, he keeps going without getting lost inside this labyrinth.」

Albano noticed that Lyle's party had never once entered a dead end and going back the way they came from. He guessed that they might have an Arts with that kind of function.

「They aren't just strong. Are they a party that's specialized in dungeons?」

Albano was thinking a lot by himself and scratched his head.

「They must have also realized that I'm following them around.」

Albano saw Lyle's party efficiently discovering the monsters lurking in the area and stopped following them.

「Well, it's enough to learn that they are a strong party I guess.」

Albano traveled jumping from rooftop to rooftop. He was smiling.

「An interesting bunch has come. Looks like it'll be fun in the future.」

Albano returned to his own party from there.

.

On the night of the same day.

The parties that Albano and Creit were leading were gathering around Porter.

They prepared several bonfires and held a little party.

Both Albano and Creit were enjoying drinking alcohol in front of the dishes that Monica cooked.

「Haha~, it has been a long time since I ate something this delicious!」

Albano was starting to eat a meat dish heartily. Creit was eating beside him with a straight back and proper manner.

The two's personalities were really the opposite from each other.

「Albano, how about you eat with a bit more manners?」

「The food will get cold if I eat courteously like you. More importantly, Lyle, it was a big help that the route you guys passed was easy to travel.」

Albano's party who was traveling behind us didn't encounter any enemies and had it easy.

Creit looked at me with admiration.

「So you're not only capable in battle but also in scouting? I don't know whether it's your own capability or your comrades, but it looks like your party is a really capable one.」

Albano pointed his fork at Creit.

「This guy is obstinate, just like his appearance, after all. His comrades are all obstinate people too.」

「Who're you calling obstinate! We're just serious.」

「Hah! You guys are too serious. Your party is strong in battle fully-armed, but useless in everything else.」

「H-how rude of you, calling us useless. I-it's just not our forte.」

Creit was looking embarrassed, so surely what Albano said was true.

I tried asking Creit.

「You aren't considering polishing skills other than fighting, or maybe recruiting people with those skills?」

Creit shook his head at my obvious advice.

「Of course I'm considering it, and I'm also taking applications for that kind of member. I'm taking applications but—I have a dream.」

「Dream?」

Creit suddenly talked about his dream, but just this one time, Albano didn't make fun of him.

「I want to become a knight.」

「A knight?」

「It's not like I was born in a family of knights, but I have admired knights since a long time ago. There are also comrades who agree with my dream, so I'm forming party with people who have the same ambition like me.」

However, Creit's shoulders slumped down.

「Because of that too, many people are unable to get used to our party's atmosphere and resigned. Especially those people who're like the typical adventurer, they said that our party is stuffy and left.」

When he noticed there were only comrades with the same dream to become knight staying in the party, he was unable to bring himself to

tell these people to polish other abilities that are useful outside of fighting.

But, even with such conditions their party still produced results, so it was hard to tell them to change.

「I understand that it's no good to pursue nothing but strength, but our party is getting stronger and our earnings are also increasing with this method. So I'm unsure on changing our party's policy.」

Albano let out a ridiculing laugh at Creit's predicament.

「Thanks to that a muscle-brain gathering that specialized in battle is formed. A party without practical application is really troublesome isn't it~」

Creit's eyes turned sharp.

「Albano, your party is also the same. It's true that our party is unbalanced, but your party is also considerably unbalanced.」

「How? My party has a lot of clever guys and can deal with many kinds of situations. We're doing well as adventurers.」

Certainly his party could do anything well.

But, they were a bit—rough if I had to say. They looked like bandits.

「Your party only looks like a gathering of guys with sticky fingers. How can you aim to be a knight like that, huh?」

I looked at Albano in surprise. He seemed embarrassed and gulped down his alcohol.

「You got a complaint!? We're rising in the world in our own way. Yeah. First we're going to form a mercenary group. Then we're going to make ourselves famous in war. With that a country somewhere is

going to employ us. Even you also planning something like that right?」

「Well yeah, but…」

The parties of the two of them didn't even reach twenty people right now.

As adventurers, their parties' size could be considered strong, but it felt like their parties were still too small if they planned on forming a mercenary group.

Albano turned the topic toward me.

「And, that's how it is. Lyle, how about you work together with me too? If you lend me your strength, I'm thinking the next time war breaks out I'll join it as mercenary. If this obstinate Creit also come along then we'll get around fifty people.」

I got invited to form a mercenary group, but if I had to say it, I was the one who wanted to invite him.

I mentioned Neu-san to divert from this topic.

「You're not inviting Neu-san? I think that person is really strong.」

I had also seen the party that he was leading, but unlike Albano and Creit, his party was balanced.

Albano averted his gaze from me.

「Boss Neu is no good. Everyone will think he's the leader if he is in the same group as us. Besides, even I cannot order that person around.」

I got the impression that he recognized Neu's strength, rather than holding a feeling of idolization toward him.

Albano was acknowledging Neu's superiority while Creit was respecting him.

「Neu-dono was a real knight in the past, after all. I admire him. However, I think it'll be difficult to invite him into a mercenary group.」

「Why?」

「—That person also has his own circumstances.」

I was glad that I could talk with the prominent adventurers of Beim at this chance and heard various things.

Even so, I could understand if it was Creit, but I never expected that even Albano was aiming to become a knight.

But, in Albano's case, rather than saying that he aspired to become a knight, I got the feeling that his objective was to rise in the world.

While I was enjoying the conversation with the two, a cheer rose from a slight distance away. Albano turned his gaze that way.

「What happened?」

「Ah, it's my companion. She's an elf, so she wants to sing at this kind of event.」

Eva was singing with Albano and Creit's party members surrounding her.

Eva was also in a good mood with such an excited crowd around her.

They were from different parties with leaders that hated each other, but after drinking alcohol they laughed together while holding each other's shoulder.

They looked like they were having a lot of fun.

Creit smiled while watching that going on.

「She has a nice singing voice. I'm honestly jealous that you have such comrades.」

Albano snorted at Creit's words and made a vulgar talk.

「What do you mean comrade? Just say it honestly that you're getting horny seeing such a pretty woman. When tomorrow comes we'll be able to relax at the back. The merchants will also come along with the prostitutes. You're also going to partake, aren't you?」

「You're always making fun of me like this!」

Seeing how red Creit's face became, it looked like Albano hit the bull's eye.

「It's true, isn't it?」

It seemed Albano was teasing him knowing that.

The two of them were starting to quarrel, so I tried to stop them.

「Well, let's stop there.」

Then the two's gaze turned toward me.

「Lyle, tell us your story too.」

「Eh!?」

Albano placed his arm around my shoulders.

「Don't hide it. Even for a harem party it's rare to have a gathering of such beautiful women. How many of them have you slept with? Or perhaps, you've slept with all of them?」

Albano asked with a grin. Creit's face reddened hearing that but he was also looking really interested.

「I'm curious too. Do you have a favorite among those girls, Lyle-kun? But if you actually have one girl who you love then a harem is just, you know…」

I was troubled even if you said that to me.

In the first place, it was already a harem situation when I realized it. It wasn't like I was carefully choosing my comrades to create this situation due to my own wish.

「No, how should I say it—I still haven't slept with anyone, our relationship isn't like that.」

Albano looked really disappointed hearing that.

「Haaaa!? Are you stupid? Your party has that many beauties and you haven't made any move at them. What are you being so hesitant for, huh? Just do it already. Your world will change after that.」

「No, you're exaggerating, saying the world will change.」

Then Creit stood up and made a fervent speech.

「It will! Your world will change! I too hesitated before, but I understood after experiencing it. You'll really feel that you have shed off your old self as a man! Lyle-kun too, you should shed off your old self! If you want I'll even introduce you to a popular establishment in Beim.」

This guy, he looked so serious and earnest and yet he had actually played around a lot?

Albano was also in high spirits, saying 「Ooh, I'll come any time!」

『Heh.』 Snickers could also be heard from inside the Jewel.

『Yeah. Lyle should become an adult soon.』

The Third's teasing voice was irritating.

『The first time is important. After all, it will have a lasting effect if you fail there.』

The Fourth's advice caused anger to well up inside.

『The safe choice for this kind of thing is to get through it with someone experienced for your first time.』

What do you mean safe? Who do you mean by someone experienced? There ain't anyone experienced in my party!

The Sixth was getting strangely high-tensioned.

『That's why I told you to go play. Listen well, Lyle. The first time is crucial. If you fail there, it will leave a lasting effect even on your next relationship. It can't be helped. When we get back we'll go straight to the brothel. The cheap place is no good. After all, it'll be hit or miss at that kind of place.』

The Seventh spoke coldly at the Sixth who was strangely knowledgeable about this kind of thing.

『As expected from someone who almost got stabbed in the back from all their womanzing, you sure do know a lot. But putting that aside, Lyle is the formal heir of the Walt House. You can't avoid this kind of matter. You should ask for some instruction from someone experienced.』

I should ask for instruction, he said.

Are you guys having fun watching your descendant in that kind of scene?

Aren't you guys just wanting to have a laugh at me, using me as joke material?

I only had enemies inside the Jewel, and no allies.

Like the Third right now who was having fun.

『Lyle, it'll be fun when we get back!』

It wouldn't be fun at all.

—But, I was a bit interested.

Creith asked me joyfully while I was hesitating.

「Oh, are you perhaps scared? It's fine. There isn't anything to worry about. Have you perhaps decided who will be your first partner? In that case you should confess to her immediately. We're in this kind of business. We don't know when any of us is going to lose our life.」

This guy suddenly turned damn serious.

Setting that aside, there was one problem with me.

「N-no, that's—I don't know who should be the first one I lay my hand on.」

Then both Albano and Creit looked at each other and shook their heads.

「This extravagant bastard. So you got a lot of choices huh.」

「Truly. I never heard of that kind of worry until now, not knowing which woman should be the first one you lay your hand on.」

These two, were they actually on good terms with each other?

.

I was lying on the inn's bed, resting my body after returning from the dungeon expedition.

After that, the expedition party safely accomplished the objective and returned to the surface.

We used the floor transfer device for our return, but it was different from the device at Arumsaas. The device here made me feel somewhat uneasy when riding it.

There were several round boards that weren't hung from above or supported from below.

Those round boards were going up and down at the center of the cylinder shaped dungeon cave with adventurers riding them.

We rode them up until the surface, but seeing the device made me worried it might fall down.

It was convenient so we would continue using it in the future, but I couldn't stop myself from feeling bothered about it.

I was lying on the bed with my hands under my head. I was talking with the ancestors.

『So I guess it was just as Lyle thought. It's good that you didn't hurry to take the test.』

After the Third said that, the Sixth talked about the parties that he got interested in through the expedition this time.

『You have talked with several adventurers, but the one that interested me was Albano. His party has good prospects for the future.』

In contrast the Seventh was recommending Creit's party.

『What is good from that kind of bunch? If I have to invite someone then it'll be Creit's party. They're questionable as adventurers, but they have no shortcoming as war potential.』

The adventurer hating Seventh favored Creit's party.

Certainly, Creit's party was really reliable if you only counted them as war potential.

But, the Fourth nitpicked at the Seventh's opinion.

『They're a bit too, hmmm, fixated with the idea of knights. I wish they're thinking were a bit more flexible.』

From the Fifth's perspective it seemed that neither was good.

『Those guys are just right for balancing each other out though. But rather than them, I'm more curious in the former knight called Neu.』

I had few chances to talk with him since he was one of the people in charge of the expedition.

I wanted to ask him various things if possible.

「I'm also curious about that person. He seems to be someone reliable.」

I acknowledged Albano and Creit's skill.

They were also strong. I wanted to win them over to my side by all means.

The Third was also intending that.

『We can't ask for extravagance, but I still want Neu-kun. I also recommend Albano-kun and Creit-kun. Well, you won't be able to find a perfectly capable person. It'll depend on whether Lyle can use them well or if you'll need to train them yourself.』

「Right. Besides, I also want to increase the member of my party.」

As I thought, having a lot of comrades would be better.

The door was knocked on when I was about to continue the talk.

The ancestors fell silent. I stood up and walked toward the door.

It was Novem.

『Lyle-sama, there is a summon from the adventurer guild.』

.

I took Novem with me to the adventurer guild. The staff who talked with me before was waiting there.

「Haha~, I already heard. You finished off a subspecies with one attack didn't you?」

「I was just lucky that time.」

The staff looked very happy. It seemed he had heard about my evaluation from the other adventurers.

I didn't know whether he was faking his happiness or if he was genuine.

「We greatly welcome any capable adventurer. Please make use of Beim's dungeon freely after this.」

The guild gave me permission to use the dungeon.

I was relieved, but Novem kept her composed look without any particular change in her expression, as though this was only natural.

I made a small talk with the staff.

「I'm relieved that it looks like we'll be able to earn some income from now.」

「Please earn as much as you can. After all, it'll also bring profit to the guild. But other than that, from now on we'll be able to offer you even more requests than before.」

Most of the quests that were brought to the guild could be categorized into several categories.

Until now we could only accept trivial quests like cleaning work or helper work, but from now on we would also be able to receive bodyguard quests or monster extermination quests.

That meant the guild had evaluated us quite highly.

「Thank you very much.」

The talk was over. We stood up and left the room.

We passed by several staff members while walking in the guild's corridor.

Novem talked to me.

「It ended up just like Lyle-sama predicted.」

It ended up just like I predicted.

We could have also taken the test early, but I was satisfied with this result.

「We could also have taken the test right away though.」

「Lyle-sama's decision isn't mistaken.」

「I wonder about that. I often make mistakes, after all.」

I had made many mistakes until now.

No—rather than making mistakes, I simply wasn't making any decision and only let myself get swept by the flow all the time.

Novem never refused my decision because she had this side in her that was blindly devoted to me.

I was happy about that, but it also made me feel lonely. I couldn't feel that Novem was saying what she really thought to me. I got the feeling as though she was seeing something else when she was looking at me.

Novem's expression turned slightly clouded and she changed the topic.

「But—」

「But?」

「—If Lyle-sama is going to make use of a brothel, please choose a place that is as safe as possible. Even with healing magic, a disease is still scary.」

「Buh!」

Novem panicked seeing me coughing in surprise.

「Lyle-sama, are you alright!?」

「I-I'm fine. But more importantly, Novem—where did you hear about that from?」

Novem looked a bit embarrassed.

「From Albano-san's party. They were talking excitedly about Lyle-sama several times when we were in the expedition together.」

Albano—did you have some kind of grudge against me?

「The brothel talk was just a joke. I won't go to that kind of place.」

「Lyle-sama won't?」

「I said I won't!」

Novem made a troubled face seeing my strong rejection.

「Lyle-sama is also a man, so it's important to take care of your sexual desire. If Lyle-sama doesn't like that kind of place, should I help Lyle-sama out with that?」

「Eh!?」

I was embarrassed with myself who became happy for an instant and almost agreed.

The ancestors were making a ruckus inside the Jewel about something, but the beating of my heart was speeding up and I went red until my ears that I couldn't hear what they were saying.

But, although it was extremely regrettable—I refused.

「N-no, I want to treat this kind of thing more seriously, or rather, is Novem really alright doing something like that?」

Novem showed me a smile.

「I don't mind anytime if it's what Lyle-sama wished for.」

But, her smile and words felt somewhat dampened.

I myself didn't really understand just what this out-of-place feeling was, and if possible I also wanted to embrace Novem but—her smile right now wasn't right.

It was a smile that was filled with affection that would accept everything, but was she really looking at me with that smile?

No, I understood that she cherished me, but it felt like it was somewhat different from treating me as her lover.

「—I'm fine, so don't mind it.」

「Is that so?」

Novem looked at me with a worried face, but I started walking a bit faster.

When the receptionist counter came into view, I caught sight of some acquaintances there.

「Amazi~ng! You're amazing, Erhart-kun!」

「Ehehe」

Erhart's group was there at a counter.

They were wearing brand new equipment. It looked like they had gone shopping.

Even so, all their equipment was only cheap light equipment.

Erhart was dressed in his usual tank top attire, but he also had a new greatsword on his back.

I stopped walking and looked at Erhart's group. Novem also stopped with me.

「Aren't they the group who picked a quarrel with Lyle-sama?」

「Yeah. And their receptionist is Marianne-san.」

Marianne-san was a woman who seemed to have a hidden side to her.

She was singing the praises of Erhart's group who had come to show her their new gear.

「All of you have worked hard until now. Recently your group's evaluation for the cleaning work is also good. All of you are getting closer to being fully-fledged adventurers. I'm having high hopes for all of you.」

It seemed Erhart's group was working diligently.

Marianne-san was excessively praising them for that too.

Erhart and his friends looked happy. Looking at them like that—made me feel sad just for a bit.

The reason was the adventurers around us.

They were making conflicted expressions seeing Erhart's group that was getting showered by praises from Marianne-san.

There was a pair of adventurers. One of them was a veteran while the other was a rookie.

The rookie was looking at Erhart's group in exasperation.

「What's with them, getting praised for doing cleaning work like that? They're looking lovestruck like that in front of a beautiful receptionist. Aa~a, I'm jealous.」

The veteran taught the envious rookie.

「You, you're jealous of them?」

「Even I also want to get praised by a beautiful receptionist.」

「You don't get it. Those rookies are ignorant country bumpkins who recently arrived at Beim. They're what you'd call the king of the hill from where they came from, I guess. Well, troublesome guys like them aren't that rare around here.」

「Haa, and so what does it matter?」

「Look at them, getting manipulated so easily just from getting praised a little bit by a pretty woman. The guild is also really slick. They prepared beautiful receptionists to train those kind of guys into convenient adventurers for the guild.」

「—Eh?」

The rookie made a surprised face and looked at Erhart's group.

Erhart was talking about their ambition for the future to Marianne-san.

「Just watch us, Marianne-san! We're going to earn a lot from now on and become first class adventurers!」

He was motivated to defeat a lot of monsters and earn some money.

Seeing Erhart's group like that, Marianne-san praised them but—.

「If it's you and your friends, Erhart-kun, then surely there won't be any problem. But, an adventurer's job isn't just defeating monsters, you know? Remember to do the quest from the guild too, okay?」

—She added a reminder for them to do the quest from the guild too.

「Leave it to us! If it's Marianne-san's request then we're going to drop everything else for it!」

「I’m happy~y. Thank you!」

The veteran adventurer looked down when he heard Marianne-san’s flirty voice from the counter.

「Convenient adventurers for the guild are created like this. Watch and learn.」

The rookie adventurer’s image of a beautiful receptionist that he pictured in his mind was crumbling.

His shoulders slumped.

「—Isn’t there any case of love blooming between adventurers and receptionists who often meet each other?」

「You’re an idiot, huh? That might be the case if your face is handsome or you earn a lot of money, but they’re here for working. Look at those guys. Do they look handsome? Do they look like they’re earning a ton of money?」

When I looked at Erhart’s group, none of them looked particularly handsome.

Besides, it was clear they were beginner adventurers if you looked at their attire. They didn’t look like they were earning a lot of money.

「If you’re a woman, will you give them the time of the day? That’s how it is.」

「Reality is really bitter.」

「Go to a brothel if you want to see a dream.」

I became sad after those two left.

The surroundings were sending sympathetic gazes towards Erhart's innocently rejoicing group.

The young adventurers looked envious toward them, but the adventurers who understood the real situation had a conflicted look on their face.

The Third spoke while watching Erhart's group.

『Well, this isn't that bad of a deal for them, is it? It certainly bothers me a bit that they're tricked, but thanks to that they can gather equipment like this and start to live like adventurer for real.』

The Fifth also had the same opinion.

『It's still better compared to dying a dog's death.』

Erhart's group finished boasting at Marianne-san and left the counter.

Then they noticed that I was here.

Erhart walked toward me. Novem moved to stand in front of me and stand up for me, so I told her 「It's fine」 and made her step back.

When Erhart arrived in front of me—.

「I lose against you right now.」

—He spoke words that I never expected.

I completely thought that he had become more confident after obtaining new equipment and came to pick a fight.

「Eh?」

「That's why, I'm saying I lose. —As frustrating as it is.」

Erhart's friends behind him also looked down or averted their gaze away.

They had become far meeker than before.

The Fourth got slightly happy seeing their attitude.

『Oho, how nice it is to be young.』

The Sixth was also similar. He was delighted by the change in Erhart's group.

『So he has the capacity to admit his own defeat. Lyle, you better remember these guys. If they survive, they will surely become strong.』

Erhart stared straight toward me.

「To be honest, I was looking down on you. But, the way you fight, or this and that—I saw a lot before this, it made me felt wretched.」

I knew that he also participated in the expedition but, did something happen to him there?]

「E-err—did something happen?」

I suspected if this might be an impostor of Erhart with how drastic his change was.

Erhart started talking awkwardly.

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—It was something that happened on the day the dungeon expedition ended safely.

The day the expedition accomplished their objective and returned to the surface finally came.

Erhart who participated as a helper was emitting an atmosphere that made him entirely unapproachable even though he was still helping with the daily work. People around him were waiting for the floor traveling device to arrive while rejoicing with others that the expedition ended safely.

But, Erhart was the only one who couldn't rejoice.

(Dammit. Why is that guy recognized while I'm not? Even though I'm more amazing than him. Even though I'm far more amazing than him.)

He had developed his Arts until the third stage and is the strongest in his village.

He came to Beim with such self-confidence and believed that he would be able to flourish even here.

And yet the reality was different.

It was Lyle who was recognized, while the other adventurers wouldn't even give him their time of day.

Erhart was sitting alone on a wooden box while waiting to return to the surface. Neu who saw him walked toward him.

「Do you have a bit of time?」

「What do you want, old man?」

Erhart acted rudely, but Neu only smiled at him.

「I'm concerned because you're alone here. Let me sit beside you.」

Neu sat down and started talking a bit happily.

「Even so, you're working seriously this time unlike before. Thank you, you're a great help.」

「—Not really. I'm just carrying the luggage, it ain't anything worth mentioning.」

He was pushed around at his village to do the menial works.

People would yell at him to help out because his strength was the only thing worth mentioning. Even when he helped out, people would still yell that he was too slow.

His work here was easy compared to that.

「It's important to carry out the work that you're given. Trust is formed by piling up such accomplishments one by one. That also applies to adventurers.」

Neu said that it was necessary to do this kind of work diligently if one wanted to succeed as an adventurer. Erhart was irritated to hear that.

「What the hell do you know? It doesn't matter how hard I work, it's always the other guy who gets praised. It's also the same this time. Even though Lyle's party had been doing nothing but cleaning the street since coming to Beim got acknowledged, we're—shit!」

He keenly felt how large the difference in strength between him and Lyle was.

Even so, it was frustrating to lose against someone who he had been looking down on.

There were only good looking girls accompanying Lyle, and in addition he was stronger and more reliable than him.

He hated that Lyle.

「Are you comparing yourself with Lyle-kun? Then you better stop that right away.」

「You also think that I can't win against that guy? Me!?」

「It's meaningless to compare yourself against other people. Besides, how do you know that Lyle-kun hasn't been working hard?」

「T-that's.」

Erhart didn't know what Lyle had been doing until now.

「He is strong. But, it's hard to believe that he became that strong without any effort. Certainly such prodigies do exist, but he had made enough preparation in the test this time.」

「Preparation?」

「He has acquired the information about the structure of this dungeon, and then the type of monsters that come out here. He must have gathered other information too. He has also prepared all the necessary things for the expedition.」

「I-it's just information」

He thought that one could defeat monsters even without such things as long as they were strong.

Neu asked Erhart.

「Did you challenge this dungeon after making that much preparation?」

「—I—didn't.」

If it was his party then they would believe they would manage somehow. Erhart's party didn't make any preparation before.

It was also the same when they came to Beim. They didn't make any plans beforehand.

「The you right now won't be able to win against him. Just knowing that is good enough, isn't it?」

「But! —I want to win against that guy.」

He was frustrated. At the same time, he hated himself who was unable to win against Lyle.

Neu said to such Erhart.

「You won't grow stronger even if you envy him. Besides, it's fine even if you can't win against him right now. What's important is what you're doing right now in order to win against him in the future.」

Erhart lifted his face.

The floor traveling device had arrived and people started boarding it.

「To win against him in the future?」

Neu stood up with a smile and headed toward the floor traveling device.

「Do your best.」

Erhart saw off Neu's back. He then stood up and strongly clenched his hand.

「Cooollllll!」

It was dubious whether he really understood what Neu said, but it still gave him strength..

.

「And so!」

I watched Erhart throwing out his chest confidently while thanking Neu-san in my heart.

Thank you very much. You've reformed this troublesome guy.

Erhart pointed at me.

「It's fine that I lose against you right now. But, one day I'll win against you! Just wait and see, I'll build a greater harem than yours in the future!」

The gazes of the surrounding gathered on Erhart, who just declared that very loudly.

Naturally, their gazes also gathered on me. It was embarrassing.

In the first place, why were you trying to have a harem competition?

It wasn't like I was trying to compete in that kind of thing.

「I-I see.」

Well, if you're fine with that then I have nothing to complain about. I thought about saying that.

But, Novem stepped in front of me and replied back with a serious face.

「Lyle-sama won't lose against you, even in the future.」

—Why are you acting so stubborn in regards to that?!

Novem is a bit strange, but she also felt cute somehow when acting hopelessly like this.

Erhart's self-confident attitude didn't crumble even when facing such Novem.

「No, I'll be the one who wins. From now on I'll earn a ton of money and also train like crazy. We'll become strong. We'll become even cooler and stronger than Lyle!」

Novem was smiling, but she didn't show any sign of conceding at all.

「At that time Lyle-sama will also have become even stronger and become even cooler and earn even more than you. You won't be able to match Lyle-sama at all.」

Even though they could just concede, both of them wouldn't give way and it devolved into an argument.

「I'll be the one who wins!」

「Impossible. It'll be Lyle-sama.」

「No one knows what the future will bring!」

「Even so, Lyle-sama won't lose.」

The Third sounded amused seeing Novem calmly but strongly denying Erhart's claim.

『I never thought that Novem-chan would get into an argument with Erhart.』

The exasperated Seventh spoke from the Jewel.

『Lyle—it's embarrassing, so stop Novem. Good grief, why does she have to be that stubborn?』

Really.

A strange switch in Novem had been flipped. It was a pain to stop the two's argument.

Chapter 104 – Sweeper

.

This place is a bar for the general public in Beim.

「Lyle, do you know about sweepers?」

I was invited by Albano and we ate there with just the two of us.

「Sweeper? Do you mean something like a cleaner?」

We continued socializing personally with each other like this even after the expedition was over.

「That's right. They're cleaners. But, what they're cleaning is adventurers, though.」

「Are they an existence that is hunting adventurer?」

「It's just a rumor. About how the guild is hiring skilled killers to hunt the nasty adventurers. There are many of these kinds of stories in Beim since a long time ago.」

Many people gathered in Beim, for good or bad.

The adventurer guild didn't ignore the adventurers who were committing awful crimes and cleaned them up using the sweepers in their employ. That was what the rumor was about.

「I have heard that rumor. There was also that kind of rumor in other guilds, but I thought it's just a rumor.」

「It's also just a rumor over here. But you're the type of adventurer who wouldn't be troubled even if this kind of sweeper really does exist, though.」

「But you're the type who'll be troubled, huh, Albano?」

「No way I'll do some unprofitable thing like doing crime. Well, I don't know if it's about the grey zone thing though. Neither of us want to get involved with sweepers anyways.」

「Yeah.」

The existence called a sweeper that hunted the adventurer—they must be strong.

Albano took small sips of his drink as he talked about the recent news.

「Let's change the topic. Big sis Alette has returned.」

「Big sis? Do you mean Alette Baillet(アレット・バイエ)?」(TN: I think there might be a typo from the author here. Last time her name came out it was Annette) (EN: Went and double checked. It is an author typo, going to be going with Alette)

I tried recalling where I heard that name before. It was a name that I heard from Miranda.

It seemed that she was a really excellent adventurer.

「—So you know her just as I thought. You have investigated around a lot, huh?」

It seemed he was asking me a leading question.

This person was really shrewd.

「I want to know about the people I might work with, after all.」

「It’s not like I’m criticizing you. And about that big sis, she’s quite the big name even in Beim. And you know, that big sis came back with quite the scary face.」

It seemed she was returning to her birthplace for a while, but apparently she had returned to Beim recently.

「Did something happen?」

「Big sis is a former noble. It seems that her family fell into ruin when she was born, but her birthplace is a small country called Lorphys. It seems that its neighboring country is acting really fishy right now.」

Several pieces of information inside my head connected with each other.

I had heard the name of this small country called Lorphys.

As for its neighboring country—was it Zayin?

「Is it Zayin?」

「Do you know something?」

We were in this bar in order to exchange information with each other.

We were talking like this because it benefitted both of us.

If I only listened without giving any information back, Albano would surely stop talking with me.

「—I heard that there’s some internal discord going on in that country.」

「Really? No wonder big sis cannot calm down.」

「That Alette-san, is she getting uneasy and trying to do something?」

The former noble Alette couldn't calm down because the neighboring country of her birthplace was showing suspicious movement.

Was she worried for her family there?

「Big sis's circumstance is also complicated after all. It'll be interesting if you try meeting her once. After all, she is leading a real knight order.」

「A real knight order?」

It was already a strange story for an adventurer to lead a knight order.

Was it related to her being a former noble?

「They introduce themselves as the Lorphys mobile knight order. It's a gathering of former nobles and knights. They're an eccentric bunch who still swear loyalty to their country even now.」

—I couldn't understand.

They were still loyal even though they weren't nobles any more?

Albano wouldn't tell me the details, so I could only investigate it myself later.

「Is there something in this country called Lorphys?」

「That country once lost a war against Zayin, so they're the most likely candidate to be targeted again. Big sis is planning to recruit mercenaries in a big hurry.」

It seems she was planning to gather mercenaries so she could oppose the enemy if it came to war.

But, it was a method that was really like an adventurer.

「Are you hired by her?」

「She is gathering comrades in order to earn money in the dungeon to fund her effort. She also invited me. I'll help her with the dungeon, but no way will I agree to be a mercenary on her country's side. I'm not going to ally myself with the losing side. Besides, the country called Lorphys is also poor.」

So he prioritized the reward rather than morals.

I had no qualification to criticize him for that.

「And so, I'm thinking of inviting you, how about it? The expedition will go easier with you there, and of top of that I got this feeling we'll also earn a lot more.」

「I'll be away from Beim starting tomorrow for a quest though.」

「Quest? How long?」

「Around two weeks. A month at the longest.」

「Then there's no problem. There's still some time until we go in the dungeon for real. Decide whether or not you'll join when you return.」

Alette Baillet—I heard that she was a capable adventurer. She also had a lot of comrades.

She was someone who I wanted to get personally acquainted with, but it made me curious what kind of circumstances she had.

「If you're going to meet big sis then look forward to it. She's an interesting person, after all.」

「Interesting?」

「She's especially interesting when she's in her "post-growth", though…heh.」

Seeing Albano reminiscing and laughing, for some reason it made a familiarity with Alette-san bloom inside me even though I hadn't met her.

.

—Late at night.

Albano parted with Lyle and went on his way home. He entered a gap between buildings.

He made some sounds there as he was relieving his urge to pee.

But, a woman's voice called out to Arbano at that time.

「It's appalling to do that here.」

Albano became unable to pee because of a woman who was approaching with inaudible footsteps.

He hurriedly put his thing back inside and turned around. Overtly standing there was a blonde haired and beautiful woman.

「That was rude of me. More importantly, what's your business with me? Right now I'm just a humble adventurer who is working diligently, you know?」

「I'm amazed you can say that with a straight face. I've also heard some bad rumors about you though?」

「It’s just complaints from Creit anyways, right?」

「There are also complaints from others.」

Albano greeted the woman lightly while putting on a bold front, but he was shivering at the inside.

(Why is this woman here huh? Don’t tell me, she came to kill me?)

She was one of the sweepers that he mentioned to Lyle.

Albano had done something that could be construed as crime before.

A sweeper was sent to him at that time.

The woman narrowed her gaze at Albano. Albano was at a loss on whether he should draw his sword or not.

But, the woman shrugged.

「We had asked you to do various things recently, so I came to thank you. It's because you won't approach me even when I happen to be at counter.」

Albano felt relieved and realized that he was sweating all over.

(Then don't threaten me like this! Haa, that was scary. I don't even feel drunk any more.)

「I'll be suspected if I carelessly approach you.」

「Lies. But more importantly, this is our thanks for the previous time.」

The woman showed a leather bag that was filled with gold coins.

Albano took it and checked the inside.

「—It's a lot.」

「A service from us. I'm thankful to you.」

Albano put the bag into his pocket and looked at the woman—Marianne.

The moonlight shined down. The mask she was wearing became visible.

Her mask was an eye mask type. It was decorated to make it look like she was crying.

「Take that mask off. It's scary when you wear it at midnight.」

「I don't want to take it off while doing this work.」

Albano wiped his cold sweat while asking a question about Marianne's quest.

「More importantly, I don't think it's something that you should be so concerned about though.」

「What do you mean?」

「I mean those brats, Erhart's group. I protected them within limitations without them noticing it but, why are you protecting them? This also doesn't feel like a quest from the guild. Why's a sweeper like you so concerned about those brats?」

The receptionist Marianne who usually could be found in the guild seemed like a harder woman.

Her leading around adventurers like Erhart's group by their nose was something that suited her.

It was suspicious that she was requesting Albano like this to protect Erhart's group from danger.

Marianne's hand moved toward Albano's mouth and touched his lips with her index finger.

「—You whose life was saved by me should just follow your order without asking anything. You don't need to know the reason.」

「G-got it.」

Marianne withdrew her index finger and warned Albano.

「More importantly, I wish that you wouldn't unneccessarily talk about the sweeper rumors to him.」

「You mean Lyle? It was just an idle talk—I got it. I'll avoid that topic from now.」

「That's a good attitude to have. Also, something like a sweeper doesn't exist. Keep that in mind.」

Albano nodded quietly at that warning.

Marianne had saved his life in the past when he was almost killed.

After that, he would receive a quest from her like this sometimes.

Marianne started walking and vanished into a cramped alley.

Albano saw her off and stroked his chest.

「What a scary woman. What do you mean that sweepers doesn't exist. You're a sweeper! Tsk! —Now I'm wide awake.」

Albano searched for a bar to drink a bit more today—

.

We accepted a monster extermination quest.

Beim itself didn't have that large of a territory, but there were several villages existing outside the city.

Monster extermination quests came from those villages. We accepted one such quest.

There were several reasons why I accepted the quest, but the biggest reason was—

「IT'S OUTSIDEEEE!」

『It’s great that May is happy.』

—May. She was spreading open her arms wide on Porter’s ceiling in a really good mood.

I watched her doing that while ignoring the Fifth’s noisy voice and talked to her.

「You can’t return to your original form in Beim, after all.」

「I want to run on the ground, and also fly around in the sky! Aa~, isn’t there a good place there that doesn’t have any people?」

『Of course you would. Of course you want to run around more. I’m sorry May, we’re making you feel cooped up in that kind of city!』

May’s true form was a qilin. Although it wasn’t really accurate to call her human form a fake, at best it could be called a sub-form.

Apparently sometimes she was driven by the impulse to return to her original form and run around because of that.

It was stressful for May to live in the city.

「We’ll go out periodically, but can you endure with just that?」

May was looking impatient. It seemed she wanted to run around quickly.

「H~m, I might be able to endure it if I’m allowed to act freely for around a week I guess?」

「One week!?」

The Fifth got annoying inside the Jewel when I got surprised like that.

『That much is fine! Do you know how stressful it was for May to live in Beim for several months? Lyle, I'll teach you about animals in detail next time.』

I shall decline.

Generally when it came to animals, the Fifth would become useless. His opinion would always be biased towards animals and wasn't really applicable, so I ignored him.

「What are you going to do for a week May?」

「Running around, relaxing? I'm also going to do my work as a qilin, I guess.」

「Work?」

「Yes! We'll defeat monsters when they increase too much, and destroy dungeons when we find one.」

I had been wondering about it since before, why would they do something like that?

「Why is May doing something like that? No, not just May but all the other qilin and sacred beasts, what is their reason to defeat monsters and dungeons?」

May tilted her head and thought for a bit, and then she smiled.

「I don't know. But Kaa-san told me that it's because of a "promise".」

「Promise?」

「Yes, Kaa-san said it was a promise with the goddess.」

I didn't really get it.

Did they really promise the goddess?

I could hear the Fifth's explanation from inside the Jewel.

『It's said that the sacred beasts were created by a goddess, after all. Perhaps they promised one of the goddesses? Though so much time has passed that even May doesn't know about the events of that time.』

「Goddess, huh.」

Novem showed her face from inside Porter when I muttered that.

Her hair that was tied into a side ponytail swayed in the wind when she got out. She held it in place with her hand.

May rejoiced when she saw Novem.

「Novem! Want to go play together with me too?」

Novem made a troubled smile and caressed May's head.

「I'll stay at Lyle-sama's side. More importantly, remember to return on time, okay?」

「Yep!」

May's attitude toward Novem, how should I put it, she had no wariness at all toward her.

It even looked like a child fawning on her mother.

Next, Miranda called to me from inside Porter while I was watching the two of them.

「Lyle, can we talk for a bit?」

When I entered inside from the hatch on the ceiling, Miranda opened the rear hatch.

She pointed at the scenery that was visible from there.

「Isn't that curious?」

「That? —Is that a horse carriage?」

There was a damaged and toppled carriage some distance away from the highway.

Was it attacked by a monster?

「Let's stop Porter here.」

Miranda shook her head when I suggested going there to investigate.

「It looks like there isn't anyone in it. That's why I'll go alone to investigate.」

There wasn't any sign of people around. Miranda wanted to investigate alone because there wasn't any sign of a trap.

「Is there something that interest you?」

「—There's something about the town and village that we passed earlier that's making me curious. I'll catch up soon, so please head to our destination ahead.」

Miranda said that and leaped out from the rear hatch of the moving Porter. A golem that Miranda created appeared just before she landed on the ground and received her on its back.

The golem had the appearance of a feline animal. It ran right away toward the toppled carriage.

.

We arrived in a village that had a lot of wooden houses.

There was a forest nearby. This place was near the border with another country.

We came to such a village riding in Porter. The village chief talked to us.

「Monsters are coming in from the other side of the border?」

「Yeah, that's right. Beim is a safe place because it has a lot of adventurers, so the monsters must be coming from other places.」

「Safe?」

「You don't know? When adventurers retire, a lot of them get tired of living in the big city and move to rural areas. This village also has quite a lot of those retired adventurers.」

The village chief was also formerly an adventurer. He also looked used to monster extermination.

They could exterminate the monsters around the village by themselves.

But, it seemed this time was difficult for them because of the great number of monsters.

「We aren't on active duty anymore, so it's hard for us to go inside the forest and chase the monsters around. Sometimes we would ask the guild to send young guys here to make them exterminate the monsters.」

It was interesting to hear the situation of Beim's rural district like this.

I continued talking with the village chief while walking through the village.

「Is there any thing strange recently?」

「Strange thing? —The increasing number of monsters that come here from other places I guess? It's troublesome that monster types that you won't find around here are also coming.」

Was there a reason for it?

「More importantly, do your extermination work properly. We're troubled because we can't enter the forest.」

「Please leave it to us.」

I finished talking with the village chief and headed to where Porter was parked.

I listened to the ancestors' conversation while I was alone.

When I saw the scenery of the tranquil village, I noticed that this village seemed prosperous.

The villagers didn't look like they were living in poverty.

『As a village, this is in the category of well-off. No, isn't this village too well-off?』

After the Third gave his impression, the ancestors' talk was getting heated.

『Seeing it being this well-off, I can't help but think that they 're cheating with their tax payment.』

『But does tax even exist here in the first place? The merchants are the one in charge around here right?』

『There isn't any sign that this village has a magistrate. True, I saw some soldiers at the nearby city, but the government here is really different compared to ours.』

『I'm curious how are they governing this place.』

They were formerly feudal lords. They were discussing how the government here was working.

I was listening to their conversation while walking, but I suddenly felt that I had nothing to do and used my Arts.

It was to check the map of this area and where the monsters were hiding.

I was planning to decide the plan going forward before I returned to my companions.

But, I found a really curious movement inside the forest.

There were red dots moving relentlessly. In addition it looked like they were chasing after yellow dots.

「What?」

It looked like the yellow dots were being chased by the red dots—birds flew out from the nearby forest when my thoughts had reached that point.

The Third stopped the conversation and talked to me.

『Oh, it looks like there is a commotion in the forest.』

I heard an explosion right after that.

The cries of the animals and birds became louder. The villagers were also getting noisy.

「What happened?」

Novem and Sophia came to me while I was pondering what to do.

「Lyle-sama!」

「Novem, where's everyone else?」

Sophia told me about everyone else's situation in Novem's place.

「Everyone is going their own way so we don't know where they are. Novem-san and I came here to meet up with Lyle-dono.」

I immediately checked the map inside the village and the surrounding area.

I closed my eyes and put my right hand's fingers on my forehead to concentrate.

An explosion went off inside the forest. It caused not only the animals, but also the monsters to go into a frenzy.

When I focused on the pursued yellow dots, it seemed the dots were humans.

This reaction was three—three people? But one person was surrounded by monsters.

I wouldn't make it even if I ran there now.

Only two of them could be saved.

More importantly, the monster group was approaching the village.

Were the yellow dots trying to escape from the forest?

「This is bad. Monsters are heading to this village.」

Sophia got flustered hearing that.

「Eh!? W-we have to solidify the defense immediately then!」

But, it was good that she was thinking what should be done right now even though she was flustered.

Novem asked me when she saw me hesitating.

「Lyle-sama, is there something weighing on your mind?」

I hesitated on what I should do, and in the end—I told Novem and Sophia.

「I found people getting pursued inside the forest.」

Sophia was surprised.

「I-inside the forest!? B-but, we have to go save them then—no, but, we have to protect this village.」

The Fifth encouraged the hesitating me.

『Don't hesitate! Make your decision quickly. It'll be the worst if you end up unable to protect either of them from worrying too much. Just go save them rather than hesitating like this!』

The number of monsters creeping inside the forest was high.

However, the number heading towards the village was also no small matter.

If I was to save the people in the forest, it would be better to bring only the minimum number of manpower.

Monica arrived while I was considering going alone.

「Chicken dickwad!」

Monica was carrying Shannon on her back.

「Lyle! The monsters inside the forest are starting to get restless because of the explosion just now! It looks like something is coming here!」

Shannon had mystic eyes, special eyes that could see mana. It seems that she used them to detect the abnormality inside the forest.

Her eyes were really convenient, but because the owner was Shannon they couldn't be used to their maximum potential.

Originally those eyes could do even more amazing things but—this was what they called pearls thrown before swine.

「I know. More importantly, where is May? And Miranda?」

Either of them would be great to have when running around inside a forest.

But the timing was bad.

Monica told me about May.

「If it's May then she had just flown away a little while ago. Looks like she'll return here in one more week. Well, May is somewhat loose with time so I think it will be more than one week before she returns.」

She already flew away.

Next Shannon told me about Miranda.

「If it's Onee-sama then she hasn't returned.」

「—I should have one of them remain.」

If May was here I would be able to ride her and enter the forest from the sky. If Miranda were here, I could ask her to create golems to ride inside the forest.

It was a bit difficult with the two of them absent. —I should have kept one of them behind.

The Fourth let out a small sigh.

『What a bad timing.』

「Let's call the two of them back right away. No—gather everyone to protect the forest. As for Miranda—」

Then Sophia asked me anxiously.

「Lyle-dono, how about the people inside the forest?」

Sophia asked whether we wouldn't save them. I answered her even while still hesitating.

「—We won't make it in time.」

Sophia clenched her hands when I told her we were abandoning them.

「I-if I use my Arts, won't it be usable for moving faster?」

「Sophia's Arts? I see!」

If I had Sophia lightening my weight, my speed would also increase.

It would burden Sophia, but there was a possibility that we would make it in time.

The Third praised Sophia.

『Sophia-chan has also grown a lot. Well, this is a curious event so let's go investigate it. It'll be alright if you have the remaining members protect this village.』

「Got it. You come with me, Sophia.」

「Y-yes!」

I immediately gave Novem instruction.

「Novem and the others are going to prevent the monsters from entering the village. They're coming from the forest, so leave Porter behind and intercept them there.」

It was possible to deal with the monsters if we knew where they came from.

However, Novem refused my instruction.

「Lyle-sama, I'm also coming.」

.

—Miranda was outside the forest at that time.

Something bothered her along the highway on the way to the village and she investigated it alone.

「As I thought, it's a trace of battle.」

There was a trace of magic usage in that place.

It looked like the toppled carriage was attacked by someone.

「Were they pursued by bandits?」

There were footprints and traces of blood—other than that, there were wheel tracks heading into the forest.

Miranda turned her gaze to the forest.

「I wonder if this is something troublesome? Hm?」

Were they escaping into the forest? She was considering that, but she heard the sound of an explosion right after that.

「Inside the forest? —Looks like I better join up with Lyle and others.」

Miranda pointed her palm to the ground. The soil bloated up and a feline animal materialized.

Miranda rode on its back and hurried it to dash toward the forest—.

.

Inside the forest.

My body leapt further than I thought each time my feet kicked off the ground.

It felt like I was advancing with consecutive jumps.

Sophia, Novem, and I had entered the forest.

Novem usually followed my instruction obediently, but today she was strangely stubborn.

Originally I wanted her to stay behind in the village to heal the wounded and face the monsters, but she came with me. Sophia who was following behind me was worried for the village.

「Are Aria and the others going to be alright?」

Most of my companions were staying behind.

「I think they'll be fine. More importantly, the problem is us.」

「Problem?」

There were people fighting inside the forest.

But, I didn't know whether those people really should be saved or not.

I told Sophia to not carelessly approach even if we found those people.

「We don't know what kind of people they are, so it's better that we don't approach them carelessly even when we find them.」

Sophia also seemed to realize it.

「I-indeed. It's also possible that they're bandits.」

In her panic, Sophia thought that the people inside the forest were innocent at first.

When talking with the village chief I heard that the villagers wouldn't go near the forest because of the many monsters.

I turned my attention toward Novem who was staying quiet in the back.

「Are you also alright with that, Novem?」

I asked her about not approaching carelessly, but there wasn't any reply from Novem.

I stopped advancing. Novem and Sophia also hurriedly stopped.

「Oi, Novem?」

「Eh? Y-yes!」

It felt like Novem was distracted. It was unusual even from Sophia's perspective.

「Novem-san, what's the matter?」

Novem put her right hand on her face as though to hide her expression.

「I'm sorry. I was thinking about another thing.」

Was she tired?

I regretted bringing Novem along, but it would be dangerous to send her back alone after this far.

「We were talking about not carelessly approaching even if there are people attacked by monsters. They aren't villagers. Perhaps they're bandits.」

I myself was feeling dubious that there would be bandits inside a forest that had a lot of monsters.

But, we still needed to be wary.

Novem apologized.

「Forgive me. I will be careful.」

「—Novem, you focus on giving Sophia and I support.」

I didn't want to make her force herself too much, so I decided that Sophia and I would deal with the situation.

We also rested a bit while talking like this, and then we departed right away.

Chapter 105 – Zayin's Saintess

.

—Two people wearing brown robes were running through an unfamiliar forest.

One of them was a male of advanced age.

「Please hurry, saintess-sama.」

The man's name was Gastone Bonini(ガストーネ・ボニーニ).

He had a thin body and a slightly bent back, as well as a wrinkled face with a hook nose.

He was in his early sixties. He didn't look it at all right now, but this man was a high priest in the Zayin Theocracy.

He had unkempt white hair and a white moustache. He tried to let the woman escape with a cane in his hand.

He looked like a bad guy from a glance, but he was incredibly considerate to the woman.

The woman stumbling inside the forest with a gasping breath was Thelma Zayin(セルマ・ザイン) —the saint who was the leader of Zayin.

She had long blonde hair that was tied into a large braid behind her and aqua colored eyes.

She was thirty years old.

She was the woman who had reigned over Zayin for many years.

Thelma had led Zayin as the saintess for nearly fifteen years, ever since she turned 15, but right now she was in the position of being pursued.

「Gastone, let's end this already.」

The exhausted Thelma fell down on the spot and sat on the ground. She spoke with a feeling of grim resolve.

「W-what are you saying! Are you alright letting Armand(アルマン) doing as he pleases like this!?」

Armand was the commander of Zayin's knight order.

He also held the post as the general in charge of leading the military.

He was Thelma's political opponent.

「There is nothing that we can do anymore. The two of the us are the only survivors now!」

Thelma broke down crying.

Gastone also looked down.

「Saintess-sama, are you alright with that? Don't you feel any regret that our fifteen years will end like this?」

Thelma laughed while crying.

「Our current situation is the result of that! If I know it will end like this then I—no, I said too much. But you know, in the end, that country won't change. It cannot be changed by us.」

Thelma had given up completely. Even so, Gastone tried to persuade her somehow.

「Saintess-sama, please stand up. You mustn't die in this kind of place.」

「I'm not the saintess anymore.」

When Gastone tried to make Thelma stand up somehow—the nearby big tree shook.

When Gastone looked over there, there were monsters on the tree's huge branches.

「They caught up already.」

Gastone was losing his calm, but he stood in front of Thelma to protect her.

Gastone raised his wooden cane and looked at the monsters looking down on them from the big branches.

Their appearance was different from normal monsters.

Their skin was black.

If that was all then perhaps one would simply think that they might be a subspecies, but their number was high.

The monsters that were pursuing them were armed goblins.

The weapons in their hands were all new things.

The armors they were wearing were also uniform.

And what stood out above all else were the collars that all the monsters were wearing.

In addition, there weren't just goblins here. There were even huge orcs heading this way.

The orcs were also wearing similar collars and their skin was also black.

Their red eyes looked at Gastone and Thelma. Then, they raised their huge weapons.

Thelma didn't move. She didn't even try to struggle.

Gastone muttered.

「O goddess. Please protect us.」

The tip of the cane emitted light. The magic activated and thorns appeared one after another from the ground to attack the orcs.

The orcs swept them away with the weapons in their hands before placing their weapons on their shoulders as if nothing had happened.

Gastone gritted his teeth.

(What in the world are these monsters? The fact that they're wearing similar armor and collars is bothering me. Besides, it's also strange how focused they are at chasing us.)

It was these monsters who were pursuing the two of them.

They escaped from Zayin through another country and entered Beim's territory, but their pursuers were able to catch up to them here.

Gastone's comrades were also killed by these monsters.

「Saintess-sama, stand up! Please run away from here, hurry!」

Zelma only looked down with her hands joined as though in a prayer, but she didn't react to Gastone.

「Kuh! So this is it」

Gastone didn’t choose to run away by himself. He resolved himself to protect Thelma until the end.

The monsters gathered and surrounded them so they couldn’t escape.

They were coordinating well with each other.

When Gastone tried to launch his magic, an arrow pierced his cane and it was thrown away from his hand.

He could see bow-wielding goblins aiming at them.

「DAMN YOUUUUU!」

An orc raised its weapon. Just when he thought that this was the end for them, a young man fell down from right above the orc.

His hand was holding a saber. The young man landed on the ground, and at the same time the black orc had been bisected from top to bottom.

A dark red blood spurted out as its body fell to either side.

Gastone’s eyes turned as wide as saucers.

The monsters immediately moved.

The goblins who were aiming from the bigger branches with their bows fired their arrows at the young man.

The young man walked forward while dodging those arrows.

He looked calm, as though he had already known where the arrows were coming from right from the start.

(Who in the world?)

This time it was the archer goblins who fell to the ground one after another.

When he looked up, a girl carrying a battle axe was bisecting the goblins one after another.

She was jumping around from branch to branch very agilely.

The monsters were also panicking from the sudden attack, but even so they moved to attack Gastone and Thelma in order to accomplish their objective.

Then the blue haired young man cut down the approaching monsters with his saber one by one.

He looked like a master swordsman with his smooth flowing movement.

The monsters surrounded the young man and attacked him from behind.

「W-watch out!」

Gastone reflexively yelled. The young man turned around and cut the monster in a single motion.

His movement was as though he had been aware from the start.

Gastone could only feel shocked by how strong this young man was.

And then, another girl also jumped down from the sky.

The girl with light brown hair was holding a silver staff in her hands.

(Who's this person?)

Gastone was shocked by the atmosphere of that girl.

His heart wasn't moved at all, even though this girl was definitely a beauty.

That girl was asking them in concern.

「Are you two alright?」

「Y-yeah. Thank you very much for saving us.」

「Save your thanks for later. First, let's run away from here.」

「H-however.」

Gastone looked toward the two who were fighting.

The blue haired young man and the black haired girl were facing the monsters who were appearing one after another from deeper into the forest.

「How about those two?」

「They will be fine. Come, quickly.」

The girl helped Thelma stand up and the three of them left this place.

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Novem led away the two who were attacked by monsters.

I saw them off before standing back to back with Sophia, who had leapt down from a tree branch.

The monsters surrounding us were wearing uniform armor.

「These guys, what in the world are they? It doesn't feel like I'm facing monsters.」

I also agreed with Sophia's frank impression.

The blade of my saber was sticky with liquid that I couldn't distinguish whether it was blood or oil.

Besides, the smell also felt more like oil rather than blood.

「I also don't know. But more importantly, can you still continue?」

Sophia's breathing was rough.

She was tired from using Arts up until we arrived here.

「S-somehow.」

She acted like she was fine even though she was tired.

But, her movement was dulling.

The Third's serious voice came from the Jewel.

That was just how dangerous he was judging the situation was.

『Are these guys really monsters? It's already rare for monsters to work together this well. In addition, I'm also curious about their brand new weapons and uniform armor.』

Most of them were wearing similar—no, exactly the same equipment.

It all looked new to me.

I thought that they might be a subspecies at first but, that was also strange.

They weren't as strong as a subspecies, even for a goblin or orc.

But they were stronger than normal goblins and orc.

It was also troublesome how complete their equipment was and how well they worked together.

The goblins attacked while we were observing their movement.

「Sophia!」

「Leave it to me!」

We fought while protecting each other's back.

I stabbed a goblin that came slashing at me, and then I used it as shield against another goblin.

The body received the goblin's attack that was merciless even against its own comrade. I pulled out my saber and aimed at the gap of the armor to stab at the second goblin.

My saber stabbed the vital spot of the goblin. It was when I defeated the second goblin that Sophia collapsed towards me.

Her robe had a large cut on it. The armor behind it became visible.

Her armor had a gash on it.

Sophia immediately stood up.

「I-I'm sorry. I let my guard down.」

She was attacked by two monsters simultaneously and was unable to defend well.

However, she defeated the two goblins properly.

The Fifth was worried for Sophia.

『This isn't good. Sophia isn't weak, but the enemies are too troublesome. These things, they're more like soldiers rather than monsters, aren't they?』

I recalled the soldiers of Walt House that I fought in the royal capital of Bahnseim Kingdom before.

These monsters weren't as strong as them, but even so it was a threat when monsters were this well-equipped and worked together with each other properly.

I immediately made my decision.

「Sophia. Novem and those people have gotten away from here. We're retreating for the moment as well.」

I talked with a small voice. Sophia nodded.

She whipped her tired body and used her Arts.

The weight of Sophia and my body became extremely light.

『Lyle, hurry!』

The Fifth raised his voice. Goblins and orcs were closing their distance around us.

The large weapons that the orcs held, the maces and greatswords, were about to be swung down at us. I immediately carried Sophia in my arms and jumped up to escape.

Weapons were swung down at the spot where we were at. I watched that from above while reaching out to a large tree branch and grabbed it.

「Oo~, we just barely made it. But, we were right to defeat the archer goblins first. It was thanks to Sophia.」

Sophia's face reddened and she hurriedly separated herself from me.

「T-that was, because of Lyle-dono's instruction.」

It wasn't me but the ancestors who instructed to first defeat the goblins that could attack at range.

Thanks to that it looked like we would be able to escape somehow.

I placed my hand around Sophia's waist and pulled her closer.

「Wha, w-w-w-what are you doing!?」

I felt apologetic to Sophia who was blushing, but first we had to escape from here.

「You'll bite your tongue if you speak.」

I jumped from the branch toward another large tree branch.

I was going to lure the monsters away from Novem and the others like this—that was my plan.

「If I can lure those monsters like this—wait!」

I immediately stopped and turned around toward the monsters.

I saw the monsters going to chase Novem and those two people rather than us.

Sophia was also surprised.

「They're heading in the direction of Novem-san and those two, aren't they? W-why aren't they chasing us but heading over there instead?」

They were intelligent for monsters.

It made me suspect whether there was a more fiendish monster that was commanding them.

But, I didn't sense any presence of such a monster.

「This is the worst. It's no good unless we hold them back here.」

I clutched my Jewel to transform it into the silver bow but—I stopped.

The Jewel was still unstable.

Even if I was going to use it, I had to be more careful. If not, it would be dangerous.

Sophia looked at me and tilted her head.

「E-err. Isn't Lyle-dono going to use the silver bow?」

「–It's difficult to adjust its power. It'll only be harmful if I'm not careful.」

In the first place, we were dispatched here because of a quest from the guild.

We would be held responsible if we caused some kind of problem.

Life lost couldn't be replaced, but even so I didn't want to cause any problems if at all possible.

Then Sophia looked like she had an idea.

「Then, what about that silver greatsword? I think that weapon will be able to blow away those monsters all in one go.」

It had the power to defeat this group of monsters with one swing, but the silver greatsword was mighty. Too mighty.

And then it would suck my mana up completely.

「I can only use it once, so no. The timing to use it is too difficult.」

Sophia's shoulders slumped and she casted her gaze down.

「—I'm sorry. As I thought, I'm really useless.」

「Eh?」

「I know even without anyone telling me. I'm not strong like Aria, and I'm not smart or skillful like Miranda-san.」

I was panicking seeing Sophia feeling depressed. Here the Fourth graded me for the first time after so long.

『Lyle, you only got thirty points when you couldn't give her reassurance immediately. Well, it can't be helped for Sophia to feel inferior, though.』

Is that so? I thought that Sophia had done well though.

The Sixth evaluated Sophia scathingly.

『Certainly she is quite strong, but she isn't as strong as Aria. Her Arts are convenient, but she herself is still unable to use it well. Besides, it's certainly unfavorable for her when she's being compared to the others in your party.』

The Third was going 『Yep, yep!』 at that. It made me irritated.

The ancestors were listing up Sophia's bad points one after another.

『She feels plain, doesn't she? She's always wearing that robe that covers her bottom.』

『She also isn't slender. Not that stimulating.』

『Her breasts are too big. They make her body style a bit unbalanced.』

『It's no good if they're only big. The shape is also important, the shape!』

『Her hair and robe hiding her nape is also a minus.』

These guys, they were saying whatever they liked.

I got irritated by the ancestors' attitude. It made me want to complain, just which part of Sophia were they looking at?!

In the first place, they were going too far with their words.

I grabbed Sophia's shoulders.

「Sophia!」

Sophia opened her eyes wide in surprise because of my sudden shout.

「Y-yes!」

「Have I ever said that Sophia is useless?」

「L-Lyle-dono never said it, but…」

Sophia averted her gaze from me. I talked honestly to her.

Certainly there were some aspects of Sophia that compared unfavorably with the others.

But, Sophia also had good points in her.

「Aria and Miranda are certainly amazing. Sophia loses against them in some respects.」

「I-I know that.」

「But! But—even you, Sophia, have amazing aspects in you. When I saw you swinging your battle axe around, it overwhelmed me, and more than anything else I felt how reliable you are.」

Sophia kept her gaze averted from me and started worrying 「I-I see. I'm overwhelming and reliable—s-should I feel happy about it?」

Why was she looking troubled like that?

「Your Arts are also amazingly convenient. Depending on how you use them, there's so many things you can use them for, just like today!」

「—I'm sorry that the way I use them is no good.」

Her thoughts went in a negative direction no matter how I tried to persuade her.

Kuh! W-what should I do now.

Certainly Sophia also had a bad side in her.

Like how she became slovenly after Growth—no, she was still better than me. I even envied her.

But, she wasn't useless by any means.

「I! I never thought of you as useless. I was really happy when you said that you'll come together with me. Besides, I have been helped by Sophia many times! If there's anyone who says that Sophia is useless, I won't forgive them even if it's Sophia herself who said that. —I need you.」

「Lyle-dono」

Sophia's face blushed.

The ancestors' voices made fun of me from the Jewel.

『Come on, praise her more.』

『The problem is because Lyle has never made it clear with words.』

『What are you going to do if you continue being unable talk this much unless we provoke you first?』

『Lyle's way of treating woman is hopeless, huh.』

『—Well, let's just ignore the Sixth. Lyle, be more attentive all the time. Also, you already have the way to get through this situation.』

Could it be, the ancestors were making fun of me?

I abruptly became really embarrassed.

And then the Third said to the blushing me.

『Yes, yes. Enough feeling embarrassed already. If you don't hurry, Novem-chan and those people will be in a bit of a pinch. Let's defeat those black monsters quickly.』

But, even if I was told to defeat them, how would I do it?

I could use the silver bow but, in the worst case—I might end up burning the forest.

I wanted to avoid that no matter what. It was difficult for me to control it right now.

The Third was starting to get irritated at me, who couldn't arrive at the answer.

『Why don't you get it? Look, you just need to kiss. Use "Connection".』

Connection—that was my Arts.

It materialized as the second stage of my Arts. It was a very peculiar Arts.

It was like a completely different thing from the first stage.

The first stage was Experience—an Arts that sped up my growth, while Connection was an Arts that connected me to other people.

When I was connected to the other person, I could easily exchange thoughts with them.

Not only that, we could even share each other's sight and my Arts.

I gulped.

The Third ignored me who was like that.

『Do Connection with Sophia-chan. It's amazing to be able to share sights and Arts with each other you know? Well, the Arts that can be shared are only Lyle's Arts though.』

Sophia looked slightly troubled seeing me hesitating.

「Lyle-dono, what's the matter?」

But, it was no good if I kept hesitating like this.

Novem and those people were in danger.

That was why, I stared straight into Sophia's eyes.

「Sophia, kiss me—buh!」

Sophia's expression immediately turned serious and she slapped me right away.

I could hear chuckling voices from the Jewel. They were really hateful.

「Lyle-dono, please think of the situation.」

That was a correct opinion.

But, I wished she would listen to me until I finished.

「Y-you're wrong! It's my Arts you know. Arts!」

「Lyle-dono's Arts? Could it be, you mean Connection!?」

Sophia went bright red until her ears. She became all shaken up with her mouth opening and closing.

「That's right. It doesn't just allow us to communicate telepathically, you'll also become able to use my Arts.」

「T-that's amazing! B-but, a kiss is—that's—」

Sophia got embarrassed.

The Fifth got irritated there and complained inside the Jewel.

『Is this the time to get embarrassed like that? Are you planning to watch Novem and those two get killed without doing anything? —If you let her die now, it'll feel unpleasant with so many mysteries about her still remaining.』

He was referring to Novem and Celes's dealings at the royal capital before this.

Was Novem really my companion?

Even the ancestors couldn't make the right decision.

No, I believed she was my companion, but I also felt that it was suspicious.

That was why the ancestors' feelings toward Novem became complicated.

I heard a sigh.

It was the Fourth.

『The Fifth is also hopeless. Listen to me, Lyle. There are a lot of women who take the matter of kissing seriously. You should take Sophia's feeling into account too.』

Then, what should I do?

This was too difficult for me. I didn't really get it.

The Sixth made a forced cough before speaking to the puzzled me.

『Listen, Lyle—this is preparation for using Arts. It's not a kiss.』

What was he saying?

The Sixth sensed my exasperation and continued talking .『Well, listen』

『Kisses are something important for women. That's exactly why, if you bluntly say things like *It can't be helped here,* or *this too is for Novem and those people's sake,* Sophia will turn cold towards you.』

Certainly, it wouldn't be amusing for Sophia.

That was why the Sixth told me to insist to Sophia, *This isn't a kiss. It's not counted!*

『And then. This here is the important point—』

I followed the Sixth's advice.

Why, you asked?

Because the other ancestors were completely powerless when it came to this kind of thing.

.

—Sophia felt awkward because Lyle fell silent.

(Was I wrong to refuse to kiss in this emergency?)

Sophia switched her thinking when she thought that she had troubled Lyle with her selfishness.

(There should be nothing wrong with Lyle-dono's decision. That's right. Just one or two kisses—but, if possible I want to save my first kiss until the important timeeeee!)

Sophia's maiden heart was crying.

However, the situation didn't allow her to complain.

「Lyle-dono!」

When Sophia called out to suggest kissing from her own initiative, Lyle also lifted his face.

「Sophia, this is a ceremony.」

「Heh?」

Lyle explained to Sophia with a serious expression.

「I also understand why Sophia can't accept it. But, this is a ceremony to bring us an advantage in battle—it's not a kiss. It's not counted as a kiss between man and woman.」

Was that the case? Sophia thought that for an instant, but she immediately shook her head.

「No, there's no way that's the case. A kiss is still a kiss!」

「It's a ceremony! Besides—I, I want, to choose a more romantic time when kissing you. That's why, this time isn't counted. If you don't agree then I'll be—troubled.」

Lyle was giving a different atmosphere from usual. He continued just like that as though to overwhelm her.

「I don't want to kiss you just because we're in an emergency. Even I want to kiss Sophia properly at the right time. That's why, I want you to not count it as a kiss this time. Please grant this request for my sake!」

Lyle was earnestly requesting her, so Sophia too could accept it.

「I-is that so. I understand. I won't count it as a kiss this time.」

Her cheeks turned hot from the middle and she became unable to understand what she was saying.

(L-Lyle-dono wants to kiss me. What's more, he wants it to be a more proper place—t-that's why, it's not counted this time. Yes! Lyle-dono is requesting me like this, it can't be helped!)

Her resistance toward kissing was weakening without her noticing.

Lyle brought his face closer to Sophia, and then he whispered.

「This time it's not counted as a kiss. But—it still make me a bit happy.」

Sophia's head became so hot it felt like her brain was boiling up. Her heartbeat was pounding hard from happiness.

「M-me—too」

The two of them kissed on top of a large branch, and then their tongues entangled with each other—.

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—Inside the Jewel.

The ancestors weren't looking outside at the kissing scene to be tactful to Lyle.

But, they could sense the Connection succeeding.

『See that!? This is my true powerrrr!』

And then the Sixth stood up from his chair and raised both arms in the air proudly. The surrounding watched him with chilly gazes.

The Third seemed to be doubtful.

『Sophia-chan already planned to accept from the start, didn't she? I wonder if this is really because of the Sixth's help.』

The Fourth's gaze toward the Sixth was colder than everyone else.

『Looks like there are many women who can be cajoled with smooth talk of this level. What was with the speech just now? It sounded so fake that I got chills.』

The Fifth's gaze toward the Sixth looked somewhat sad.

『Do you guys understand the feelings of a parent watching his son looking so proud after tricking such a naïve girl?』

It seemed he was feeling guilty from tricking a naïve girl like Sophia.

The Seventh was also the same.

『Won't Sophia accept it if Lyle just asked her earnestly? This isn't the Sixth's achievement.』

The Sixth was showered by criticism from everyone, but he folded his arms and turned his gaze to everyone—and snorted.

Everyone's cold gazes turned hot—filled with anger.

『You guys don't understand at all. True, that Sophia will obey if Lyle asked her. But, would she really accept it from deep within her heart? How would Sophia feel when she saw Lyle doing his best for Novem's sake and asking to kiss her for that?』

The Third and the Fourth looked at each other.

『Eh? She was still tricked, so it doesn't change the fact that it's still a horrible thing ,doesn't it?』

『There's no doubt that what he did is the worst.』

The Sixth swung his fist on the table.

『Stop complaining! In the first place, it's horrible of you guys to call that tricking her. The ends justifies the means. Besides, the problem will be resolved if Lyle kisses Sophia again later. There won't be any problem if things work out peacefully with that. Rather, it's those who aren't considering Sophia's feeling who are the horrible people here, aren't they?!』

The Fifth watched the Sixth's argument and asked one thing that was in his mind.

『But you didn't think of Lyle's feelings, did you?』

The Sixth averted his gaze.

『He was able to kiss a cute girl. Lyle is really a blessed man. In the first place, he doesn't dislike her right? Then there's no problem. Lyle too should use this chance to learn more about womanizing. Yosh, let's tell him to go to the brothel when we return!』

This guy is the worst, everyone's opinion other than the Sixth was united—.

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—Novem and the others were taking a break at a place some distance away from the black monsters.

Gastone and Thelma who had been running continuously within an unfamiliar forest couldn't even stand any longer.

Their stamina and willpower were also already at their limit from being pursued this whole time.

Novem wanted to escape in a hurry, but they would only get caught up if she forcefully made these two run.

And so she made them rest for a bit—she also wanted to ask their story.

Novem turned a sharp gaze toward Gastone.

「You mentioned that your name is Gastone-san, isn't it?」

「I-indeed. Thank you—f-for—rescuing us—」

Gastone was gasping for air. Novem asked him the important question.

「Please tell me one thing. —What are those black monsters? Why are "those things" chasing after the two of you?」

Novem was thinking about the black monsters.

(Where in the world did they create those things?)

Gastone shook his head.

「I-I don't know. We left the country and pursuers were sent after us—those monsters were chasing after us from about midway.」

Novem had heard their conversation before they were rescued.

This woman was Zayin's saintess—in other words, the possibility was high that the pursuers were related to Zayin.

(Did Zayin create them? But, their national power should be insufficient for that. If there is a country that can prepare more budget and equipment—)

Novem knew about those black monsters.

But, she thought that they shouldn't exist.

Because of that, she showed an over-reaction when she caught sight of them today.

The reason she accompanied Lyle and Sophia was also because of that.

「Do you two know anything? I don't mind no matter how trivial the information is.」

「E-even if you ask us that—」

It seemed Gastone really didn't know anything.

But, Thelma whose breathing was gradually calming down raised her face and answered Novem's question.

「—I-I've heard a rumor before.」

「Rumor?」

「A rumor that there is a way to enslave monsters. I thought that such a thing is impossible, but when I saw those monsters chasing after us so persistently, perhaps that rumor is true.」

「Who did you hear it from?」

「I heard it from a knight when I was still in my country. It seems that knight heard that rumor from a merchant.」

Gastone seemed to recall it too.

「N-now that you mention it, I think I also heard about it ten years ago. But, something like that is impossible. Until now there has been many ideas thought up to enslave monsters, but all of them ended in failure.」

Novem reached a single possibility.

(Merchant—I see.)

There was one place around here that could prepare abundant budget, equipment, and also manpower.

Novem turned her gaze toward Beim.

(They're repeating the same thing once more. —They really are beyond saving.)

Gastone and Thelma didn't even have the composure to pay any mind to Novem. They sat down to catch their breath and rest their body.

Novem held her staff and took a position to protect Gastone and Thelma.

Thelma asked her with a puzzled look.

「What's the matter?」

Novem only replied briefly.

「They caught up.」

Black skinned goblins rushed out from the bushes inside the forest.

Novem deflected the attacks of all the monsters attacking her with her staff.

Gastone was surprised seeing that.

「You're very skilled for a magician.」

Both Gastone and Thelma were impressed seeing Novem easily deflecting the enemies' attacks.

However, the situation wasn't really good.

Novem was thinking about unleashing magic when Lyle and Sophia arrived at that timing.

The two of them leaped in front of Novem and the others and slashed apart the monsters.

Lyle and Sophia were showing a level of teamwork as though they had fought together for many years.

「Sophia!」

「Yes!」

Lyle crouched down right when Sophia, standing behind him, threw her battle axe.

Sophia's battle axe passed through within a hair's breadth above Lyle's head. It rotated as it chased the monsters down, bisecting them one after the other.

Novem looked up.

A goblin was jumping down to attack Sophia.

「Oh no. Sophia-sa—」

The one who moved before she could finish calling out was Lyle.

Sophia joined her hands together for Lyle to put his feet on them, and threw him up

Lyle slashed the goblin about to attack with his saber. Sophia's battle axe was heading towards Lyle in midair, so Novem who noticed the danger raised her voice.

「Lyl—」

But, Lyle caught the battle axe without even looking and threw it immediately back to Sophia.

And he threw it strongly too. If he made a mistake, it would injure Sophia seriously.

But, Sophia caught it with her right hand without even looking and slashed the attacking monsters powerfully.

Gastone opened his mouth in surprise.

「Wh-what an amazing way of fighting.」

It was like they were one in body and soul—their movement was in complete synchronization.

Seeing their movements, Novem’s heart ached slightly—.

Chapter 106 – Card

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Connection.

I had used this Arts before in order to communicate telepathically with May in her qilin form, but I learned something new from being connected with Sophia like this.

「This is—tougher than I imagined.」

I had the ancestors' Arts active. And then, Sophia had also been added into the equation.

It felt like my field of vision had increased by one.

Using the Second's Arts, I could sense the movement in a wide range centered around me like the back of my hand, and at the same time I also received information that was sent from Sophia.

It was tough even for me, who was routinely using multiple Arts.

It must be even tougher for Sophia.

In fact, she was breathing really hard.

「T-this is tougher than I imagined—uh!」

Sophia pressed her hand on her mouth. She fell on her knees there and vomited.

It seemed the amount of information entering her head was too much.

I tossed away my already battered saber and snapped my right hand's fingers. Then a magic circle formed on the ground.

Two new sabers flew out from there. My hands caught one each and I swung them hard.

The sabers' sheaths came off and their blades appeared.

「Sophia, rest for a bit.」

「M-my apologies.」

She used her battle axe like a cane to stand up somehow. I narrowed down the information I sent to Sophia to decrease her load.

This Art was really useful, but it was dangerous to use it at the crucial moment without preparation beforehand.

Time was needed to master the usage of this Art.

Sophia had worked hard enough in such a condition.

But, the enemies were still coming out from the forest one after another.

Every single one of them was wearing similar equipment. They were also wearing the same collar.

「Is that the trend among monsters recently?」

I tightened my grip on my sabers and broke out running, then magic flew out from inside the forest.

Red flame became a fireball and flew out from inside a bush. Although it surprised me, I immediately bisected the flame into two with my saber.

I immediately searched for the perpetrator.

「That's reckless, doing that inside a forest.」

Even monsters would refrain from using magic that would burn the forest.

And yet, the magician—goblin mages that showed up from within the bushes were using fire element magic without hesitation.

「Are you planning to burn yourself too!?」

The forest would be torched if I didn't hurry and defeat the goblin mages.

I leaped forward, but the orcs attacked me in order to protect those goblin mages.

I dodged the orcs' weapons within a hair's breadth and then slashed with my saber.

However, their armor got in the way and I could only deal a shallow wound.

「Kuh!」

The sabers I'm using are only good for several hits. Their sharpness also wasn't great.

They immediately became chipped and worn out when I used them.

「I should have bought better weapons.」

I was regretting it at this late hour. But then the ancestors were recommending their weapon as though there was no better time than this.

『I told you that a double-edged sword is better, just as expected. Even when they lost their edge they can still become blunt weapon.』

『Lyle is dexterous, so a short sword and the like would be better for him. You can also bring a lot of them, and you can also throw them.』

『—I think a gimmick weapon is also nice.』

『If you're a man then use a spear! An axe! Actually, the halberd that combines the two of them is the strongest weapon!』

『This is the age of the gun. Lyle, it'll be easy to obtain a gun in Beim. You should collect them.』

The five of them were each recommending their own favorite weapon. They hadn't changed from the beginning in this respect.

I tried defeating the orc by stabbing it at the throat with one of my sabers, but the blade snapped before I could pull it out.

Its quality was worse than I thought.

I threw away the saber with only its handle left and then defeated the other orc as well, but the goblin mages had finished their preparation at that time.

The magic was fired inside the forest and the forest caught ablaze.

「T-this is bad!」

I could hear the flame's crackling sound.

The goblin mages were also starting to fire even more magic at the surroundings.

「These guys, they're planning to bring us down with them?」

Just what in the world were they thinking?

I tried stopping the fire immediately, but a wind cut apart the spreading flame.

I jumped back in a panic. The ground where I was standing at had been gouged by a wind slash that left a scar on the ground.

A single line was carved on the ground, and then I heard the sound of a branch getting stepped on.

A man clad in a black robe came from the place where the flame had been cut apart by the wind.

There were monsters around him. They were equipped with uniform armor—and collars.

The man was wearing a mask.

「Good grief—what a flashy battle. Do you know how much damage you've caused?」

That man was undoubtedly a human.

At the beginning I sensed there was one person inside the forest who was surrounded by monsters.

I thought that it was someone who was late to run, but it seemed this guy was the culprit.

「Who are you?」

It would be lucky if he answered—I asked with such a thought, but the masked man only chuckled.

The man's mask was designed to look as if it were laughing.

「Do you think I'll tell you?」

「That's too bad.」

The man pointed his hand toward me—and then sharp needles flew out from the ground under the man one after another.

The needles were heading towards me, so I thought of jumping to the side, but I immediately cancelled that thought, discarded my saber and put both my hands on the ground.

A large earth wall appeared in front of my eyes and blocked all of the needles.

The man spoke with an impressed voice from behind the wall.

「So you can use magic? You'd surely have become a famous adventurer if you only didn't meet them at this place.」

It was then.

The Fifth muttered with a cold voice.

『—How does this guy know that Lyle is an adventurer?』

We should have only met just now.

It was possible that he judged we were adventurers from our appearance, but it sounded like he had already known from the start.

I took some distance away and the magic that the man fired hit the earth wall that I created.

The large fireball scorched the ground and blew away the wall.

At the same time the fireball burst and splashed at the surroundings.

「Oi oi, are you screwing around?」

He was burning the forest.

He didn't even care about that at all.

「I’m also working over here. My bad, but I’ll have everyone here die.」

So, he didn’t intend to let us escape.

Then, I guess it wouldn’t be a problem even if I got a bit violent.

I quietly calmed my breathing.

The flame was spreading even now. It was painful to breathe due to the smoke and heat.

I watched the opponent’s movement amidst that.

The masked man in the black robes looked at the defeated monsters in the surrounding and shrugged.

「Good grief, even though these things cost a lot of money. Well, I guess facing somewhat stronger opponents like this is also a good test for this guy.」

Behind the masked man—from inside the forest, an ogre that was bigger than even the orcs came out.

Its hands were holding two greatswords.

Its black skin and collar were the same as the other monsters.

A large horn was growing on its head. Its long white hair was springing out thornily, like a mountain of needles.

The large orcs that I needed to look up at were something like children compared to this thing.

「This thing is really big, huh.」

The masked man showed his composure in response to the impression that I muttered.

「I shall recognize your courage for being able to speak calmly like that even after seeing this guy. This guy is the strongest monster even among all the monsters that we enslaved at this present time. It's several times stronger than a normal ogre. —Now, kill him!」

The monsters obeyed the man's voice. They attacked me with the ogre at the lead.

As I thought, this man was undoubtedly the one controlling the monsters.

But, he was showing too much composure in front of me.

「It's too early for you to feel triumphant!」

The masked man was a bit surprised seeing me crouching on the spot.

But, I shouldn't be the one he was focused on.

Behind me, there was Sophia with her battle axe held at ready.

She twisted her body to the limit. And then she swung the battle axe at full strength with blue flame enveloping her body.

The blue flame was swaying following Sophia's movement. The swirling flame spread out in a spiraling shape.

「-AAAAA!」

Sophia threw her battle axe. It rotated in the air while passing above my head.

The battle axe was clad in blue flame. It looked like a blue ring when rotating at high speed like that.

The battle axe passed through the monsters that were rushing toward me. Then, black blood splattered the surroundings.

The blue flame enveloping Sophia—and the battle axe was the First's Arts that was recorded inside the Jewel, Full Burst.

The monsters' blood showered the blazing trees and created sizzling sounds *juuuu*.

The battle axe was still rotating even now and attacked the monsters in the surroundings.

The masked man panicked seeing the battle axe that was trailing the enemies.

「A homing Arts! You guys!」

The masked man immediately tried to retreat from there. He tried to withdraw behind an orc that was carrying a large shield.

But, he couldn't escape like that.

He had been locked-on by the Second's Arts, Select.

The battle axe would continue pursuing the enemy until it stopped rotating.

Sophia's battle axe sent the shields of the orcs trying to protect this man flying. It gouged through flesh and passed through. Then, it cleaved through the masked man's left arm before piercing into a large tree.

The masked man pressed his hand on his severed left arm.

「GAAaaaAAaaaa!!」

I rushed toward the masked man that was screaming in intense pain and stabbed his leg with a saber that I immediately took out, pinning him to the ground.

There was a tree root at the spot I stabbed. The saber wouldn't come out that easily.

After capturing the man, next I faced the ogre that was heading toward me.

This guy didn't try to protect that man.

Was it only following the order it was given?

「Sorry, but I have no time. I don't plan to let this area turn into a burnt field after all.」

The whole forest might get burned thanks to the flame that the masked man launched.

I turned my back on the approaching ogre and ran toward the battle axe that pierced a large tree. I took it in my hand.

Blue flame resided inside my right hand that was holding the battle axe. That flame was transmitted through the battle axe and its blade was enveloped in flame.

「This kind of weapon is better against a big guy like you!」

I dodged the downswing of the ogre's greatsword and cut off its arm.

The ogre immediately tightened the grasp of its opposite hand and swung his sword, but I cut off that arm too.

The ogre lost both its arms, but its eyes showed no fear.

It didn't even show anger.

The Seventh was perplexed.

『Really, just what are these things!?』

It seemed even the ancestors had never faced anything like this.

However the Fourth was calm.

『There's no need to panic. We already understand that this monster only acts in following orders. That's all there's to it. It change nothing on what we should do.』

They were troublesome opponents but, they had no will to fight by their own initiative.

They only obeyed the order, and they had no explosive burst of power—no drive even when they were cornered in a desperate situation.

The ogre tried to bite me, but I swung down the battle axe and finished it off.

It ended too easily.

I stabbed the battle axe into the ground and walked toward the masked man.

The masked man was in pain.

「You talked too much. Thanks to that we were able to prepare flawlessly.」

「P-prepare? What are you saying?」

It looked like he couldn't understand.

But, I certainly managed to finish my preparation with Sophia.

We were connected with Connection, so to speak—the voice of our hearts? Anyway, with that I and Sophia finished our preparation without the masked man noticing and switched into a counterattack.

When I looked back toward Sophia, she was smiling at me even while looking pained.

「I-I've done my best.」

「You did great for your first time, Sophia!」

「I-I don't want to improvise right at a crucial moment like this anymore though.」

The blue flame enveloping Sophia's body was gradually turning smaller and vanished.

Sophia sat down on the spot and coughed from inhaling the smoke in the surroundings

We needed to extinguish the flame spreading in the forest.

I turned my gaze to Novem who was fighting the other monsters, protecting the two people we resccued.

She blew away the last of the monsters with magic. With that all the enemies were defeated.

It seemed Novem guessed what I wanted to say. She lifted up her staff and fired magic into the sky.

「—Water Bullet.」

Several water balls were fired from her staff with that. They burst in the sky and rained down on the surrounding area.

The spreading flame was extinguished and only a burnt scent was drifting in the air.

With this we didn't need to worry about forest fire.

I looked at the masked man who was lying in pain on the ground.

「Now then, let's have you talk about what's going on here.」

However, the eyes of the man that were looking at us from the holes on the mask glared briefly—and then they rolled back.

I heard tsking voice from inside the Jewel.

『Poison huh.』

The Sixth's words made me remove the mask immediately. Blood flowed out from his mouth as soon as I took off the mask.

Novem saw that and immediately ran toward me who was turning pale.

「Lyle-sama, get away from there immediately!」

「Eh?」

Then, the man's chest started to shine.

『Lyle, jump back!』

I swiftly reacted at the Third's voice and tackled Novem who was running toward me to get down on the ground.

At the next instant, an explosion thundered from the spot where the man was at.

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—Shannon who was hiding inside Porter was scared by the sound of battle from the surroundings.

「Why does it always turn out like this!」

Trouble would occur at quite a high probability since she followed Lyle.

It even made her worried that he might actually be cursed.

Clara was also inside Porter. She talked to Shannon.

「The number of monsters has decreased. Looks like it'll be over soon. Shannon-chan, can you check the situation out a bit?」

Shannon was often entrusted with the task of searching for the enemy because of the mystic eyes she possessed.

She turned toward the driver seat even while feeling scared, and then she checked the situation outside.

She could hear the voices of Aria and others from outside.

「Eva, cover me properly!」

「Shut up! If I take my eyes off of you for a moment you'll be gone in a blink, so it's hard for me to give cover fire here!」

She could hear Aria and Eva arguing with each other.

Aria was using her Arts to rampage all over the place. Eva was giving cover fire for her—however, Aria was so fast that Eva's cover didn't make it in time.

Eva got on Porter's ceiling and aimed her bow from there.

A goblin jumped at Porter and climbed to the ceiling to attack Eva there.

Porter's ceiling became noisy with a clattering noise.

「This damn bastard!」

She heard Eva cursing with dirty words and then a goblin was sent flying with a kick.

On the other hand, Monica looked like she was dancing even though she was on a battlefield.

The skirt of her red maid uniform fluttered lightly in the air when she twirled on the spot.

Monica's twintails were fluttering behind in a slight delay, but that sight looked completely mismatched in the battlefield.

However, the large hammer that Monica was holding looked really suited for the battlefield.

「Ha~, I'm not good with this kind of cleaning. But I can't cut corners. Because—I'm a perfect maid!」

She said that while sending monsters flying one after another.

Shannon's eyes that were watching the situation around her were gradually shining golden. Shannon's eyes that could see mana could see the movement of the monsters inside the forest.

「—I think almost all of the monsters inside the forest have come out.」

Clara was troubled at Shannon's vague words.

「Can you describe in more detail?」

「I don't know myself. It's not like I can do the same thing as Lyle. More importantly, what'll become of the quest this time?」

「The monsters have come out from inside the forest. We're going to go with a wait-and-see approach for the situation after we get through this.」

Miranda created several golems around Porter and defeated the monsters one after another.

The villagers were hardening the village's defense at the rear.

Shannon was complaining about May who wasn't here.

「Even though it'll be easier if only May is here. She's useless even though she's a qilin.」

It looked like they would be able to protect the village somehow—.

.

Inside the forest.

I slowly stood up after the masked man blew himself up.

「A-are you injured, Novem?」

Novem stared at me with a terribly shocked expression.

「Why—why did Lyle-sama protect me?」

「No, my body moved before I could even think.」

「Lyle-sama shouldn't do anything like that!」

I would be troubled even if you told me that.

「But both of us are unharmed.」

「That's simply the outcome. Please don't do anything like that anymore from now on. If something happen to Lyle-sama, I—I won't be able to live.」

I tried to laugh it off as her exaggerating too much, but Novem's face was extremely serious.

I thought that it would be bad to joke around here and apologized 「My bad」, then I checked whether I had any serious injuries. Novem herself also looked fine, so I dusted myself off.

Sophia approached us.

「Are you two alright!?」

「Yeah, somehow.」

When I looked at the spot where the masked man was at, there was nothing remaining after the mighty explosion.

The Seventh was on his guard from that.

『The enemies are really thorough. We encountered a troublesome bunch. There's also still the duo that was pursued by them.』

I turned my gaze toward the pair that we rescued.

An old man and a woman—at first I thought they were parent and son, but they didn't seem like ordinary people based on their conversation and their pursuer.

The two noticed my gaze and expressed their thanks.

「I thank you for rescuing us.」

The woman stood up unsteadily and took off her hood to show us her face.

She was a beauty, but there was this atmosphere around her that was more than that.

The old man was also the same.

「We were saved thanks to you three. I would want to express my gratitude if possible, but we don't have any capacity to do anything right now.」

The Third muttered after seeing the old man.

『—For now, let's hear their story.』

We also had to check the surroundings. We took a break for now.

「Novem and Sophia, protect these two. I'll check the surroundings.」

Novem grabbed my arm.

「No. Lyle-sama should rest. I'll check the surroundings.」

「But」

「It's also important to ask the two of them the situation. Besides, Lyle-sama is also tired, right?」

Certainly I had forced myself a lot. I couldn't even use Arts satisfactorily right now, so I wanted to rest for a bit.

「Got it. Don't go too far from here. Just check whether there is still fire remaining.」

「Yes.」

Novem left. I led the three to search for a place to rest.

A nearby tree's roots looked like they were easy to sit on, so we sat down there and I asked them their situation.

「How about you two tell me about what's going on.」

The old man—Gastone-san was reluctant at first.

「You'll be unable to withdraw if you know the situation. It'll endanger your life.」

「We're already involved.」

「—It can't be helped.」

Gastone-san gave up and started talking. He introduced himself to us.

「Please allow me to introduce myself once more. My name is Gastone—a former high priest of Zayin.」

「High priest?」

It was an amazing title, but I didn't really get just how high the position was.

The ancestors were also the same.

『That title's role and naming differ depending on the country. It's troublesome.』

There would be a lot of difference in a role's name and status depending on the country.

The Seventh also had the same opinion.

『Although he called himself a high priest, that kind of role is usually held by relatively many people in a country. If you include those self-proclaimed high priests then it'll be even more.』

This time the woman was the one talking upon seeing my confusion.

「Please think of the position like that of a prime minister. Gastone is someone who has been assisting me for many years. And then, I am Thelma—Zayin's former saintess.」

Sophia's mouth opened and closed wordlessly hearing that.

「I thought that you two might have come from Zayin, but by saintess you mean the one with the highest position in that country, isn't it!? E-err, is it normal for the saintess to be in this kind of place?」

She was unable to believe that such a big shot was in this place.

It would be more convincing to think that these two were trying to trick us.

However, their color that was shown in the Sixth's Arts was blue—they were allies.

They harbored no hostility. Rather, they were harboring favorable impressions toward us.

「Why are such distinguished people in this kind of place?」

Gastone-san hung his head down in frustration when I asked that.

「We were in the middle of running away. We were heading toward Beim.」

「To Beim?」

Thelma-san nodded.

「We were fleeing to another country.」

The ancestors inside the Jewel immediately understood「Something happened」 when they heard that.

『Oh ho, isn't it amazing if they're the real thing?』

『I think the possibility is high. I can understand why those monsters and that masked man were sent if their targets are so high profile.』

『Zayin huh—the situation there right now might be developing into a civil war, wasn't that it?』

『Yes! The discontent toward the saintess and high priest who has been holding authority for many years is worsening there, if my memory isn't mistaken—this situation, it came. This is a big prize!』

『Looks like helping others is really something that you ought to do. I never thought that we would catch this kind of big fish, of all things. Lyle, great job!』

Why were they rejoicing?

Didn't they conclude just a little while ago that we couldn't get involved with Zayin's situation?

In the first place, why was it that important that we had saved these two?

For some reason the situation ended up like these two had entered our protection, so for now let's keep them close at hand.

I talked to the two of them while the inside of the Jewel was getting noisy.

「I'm an adventurer from Beim. My party came to a nearby village because of a quest. If you two are also heading to Beim then we can take you along until there.」

Gastone-san rejoiced hearing that.

「That'll be a great help for us. But, is it really alright? If we stay together with you, then you will get targeted again along with us, you know?」

It would certainly be dangerous, but the ancestors didn't show any sign that they would let the two of them get away.

『You won't get away! Lyle, you absolutely mustn't let them escape!』

『Let's make them completely indebted to us here so they understand that we are their ally. Lyle, you need to treat them courteously.』

『That’s right. After all—they’re one of our important cards.』

『This is getting fun! To think that a chance will fall into our lap like this. I never even dreamed it! Lyle, you’re really lucky just as I thought!』

『Lyle, don’t let our just cause get away. After all—we’re going to make them cooperate with us.』

—Surely they were scheming something with wicked faces right now.

Or rather, what did they mean, just cause?

Even if these two were speaking the truth, they might actually be bad people deep down.

The ancestors were getting excited without end.

The Third’s tension was through the roof.

『Yep, this is great. It’s great! This is getting fun now, Lyle!』

—It didn’t feel fun at all.

Chapter 107 – Money

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—Outside the forest.

It was a place that was far away from any settlement, with nothing around in the surrounding area.

There were men wearing black robes there, with several wagons lined up.

The wagons were filled with several expensive looking magic tools. The men were using them to check the situation in the forest.

Everyone was wearing the same mask.

Their masks were white with a laughing design drawn on them. They made for a very eerie sight.

Each person was wearing a different attire under the black robe.

The man who seemed to be the leader among them was watching a crystal ball and sighed.

「—It seems he blew up himself. It's a failure.」

A masked woman dressed like a warrior shrugged when she heard that.

「Wasn't the burden too heavy for a newcomer's test?」

The leader shook his head.

「Someone who can't accomplish at least this much has no qualification to become our comrade. More importantly, we lost too much fighting strength.」

The wagons were loaded with a lot of cages.

The black monsters were unleashed into the forest from these cages.

「Enslaving monsters is good and all, but it's useless if they're weak. Then, we need to deal with this ourselves.」

The warrior woman grabbed the handle of the sword on her waist.

The leader stopped her in exasperation.

「Don't move while we still don't understand the situation. I already sent scouts—hm?」

The leader stopped talking as he looked into the magic crystal ball. And then he gave orders to everyone after staying quiet for a while.

「Withdraw! We're retreating from here right away.」

「Haa? Why? Are you saying to let them get away just like this? If we return like this, we don't know what the top brass will say.」

The leader explained briefly at the warrior woman.

「I lost the signal from the scouts I sent out.」

「—Did something get them?」

「I didn't sense any enemy. Their signals vanished at a place where there weren't even any monsters. We can't lose any more manpower than this.」

The men he sent out as scouts were skilled.

The signals of those skilled scouts vanished inside the forest.

It was hard to believe that they got into an accident inside the forest and died.

「It’s a failure this time.」

When the warrior woman said that, the leader put away the crystal ball while replying.

「It’s better than getting annihilated. We’re returning right away to report this.」

They covered the wagons with cloth in order to hide the cages and magic tools.

And then everyone took off their black robes and changed outfits to look like merchants.

They looked eerie when wearing the masks, but they only looked like a group of merchants when the masks were taken off.

「—So the assassination of Zayin’s saintess and high priest failed.」

The leader muttered that at the end and led the group to withdraw from here—.

.

Novem joined up with us a bit later, and then we returned to the village. It had become night when we returned.

Thanks to Aria and others managing to guard the village, the quest could also be counted as a success after a fashion.

The village chief even thanked us.

But, the problem was after that.

I covered my face with both hands inside Porter after hearing the story.

It became hard to keep staying here seeing the woman crying in front of me.

My other companions were also the same.

No one interrupted Thelma-san's story.

「Even I—even I didn't stay as the saintess because I like it! But, the knight order always wants to go to war right away, so what will happen to the people living in Zayin if they get what they want? There are only warhawks in the knight orders who forget that the country is exhausted after all these wars—even though I myself wanted to retire and marry!」

I turned my gaze away from the crying Thelma-san to Gastone-san.

Everyone else was also sending him a criticizing gaze.

Gastone-san made an excuse in front of that.

「N-no, even I thought of preparing someone else who will focus on improving domestic affairs and continue the government as the saintess-sama's replacement. But, if I searched for a replacement saintess with my position as the high priest, I would be criticized as trying to keep my position indefinitely, so I couldn't make any moves.」

This country called Zayin was troublesome.

The priests who aimed to become the high priest—especially the elites among them were preparing girls who could possibly become the next saintess.

And then if the girl who they backed up managed to become the saintess, the priest themselves would also get ahead and become the high priest.

Wasn’t it problematic to govern the country with such a system in place?

You guys were really deciding the leader of your country with that method?

Well, I wanted to say a lot of things here, but certainly if the current high priest decided the next saintess, authority would be easily monopolized by him.

I thought that Gastone-san’s excuse wasn’t wrong but—I also got the feeling that the system itself was mistaken from the start.

The Fourth was bewildered.

『What a strange country. But if a country is running with such a system, that means there was no problem with it until now. No, or perhaps the country can still run even though there is a problem?』

The Third was laughing.

『There is no country without problems, after all. Now then, I can see quite a lot of the situation right now.』

If we could believe the story of Gastone-san and Thelma-san, Zayin was a theocracy and yet they kept warring with their neighboring countries.

It seemed that investment for the country’s internal affairs became insufficient because of that.

The reason they wouldn’t stop warring even in such a situation was because of the thought process of 「The country is poor? Then let’s steal from another country」.

What was sad about this was that the countries around Beim all had a similar thought process to this.

I heard that there were a lot of wars around Beim, but this was just horrible.

It was at that time Gastone-san appeared.

He saw the situation that was going on until now and went 「No, let's just develop the country internally!」. He started his own faction and splendidly made Thelma-san into the saintess.

After that they decreased the number of wars and invested the budget within the country.

They also produced quite the results, so Thelma-san's popularity was high.

However, the knight order's dissatisfaction was accumulating because they wanted to go to war.

The priests in the opposing faction were also the same. They schemed to place the girls in the pro-war faction as the next saintess.

If they succeeded then their effort to stop wars until now would have become meaningless, so Gastone-san asked Thelma-san to keep being the saintess until now while he somehow managed the opposition.

Thelma-san was crying.

「Even though normally a girl becomes the saintess at fifteen and retires around twenty and marries! At the latest, they will retire in the middle of their twenties—and yet, I'm already past thirty now! Even though I myself want to retire quicklyyyyyy!」

And so she missed the suitable age for marriage.

I recalled something there.

「Eh, thirty? So you're about the same age as my mother—」

Thelma-san stopped crying and stared fixedly at my face, then tears gathered in her eyes once more.

「—Even though it wouldn't be strange for me to have a child this big alreadyyyyyy!」

She started crying again.

Everyone's cold gazes were directed at me this time.

Aria was exasperated.

「Lyle, think a bit more before you talk.」

「S-sorry. B-but, Thelma-san looks far younger than my mother, you know?」

Thelma-san was sobbing while speaking of her grudges toward the knight order.

「I threw away my happiness to devote myself to the country, and yet they called me a witch. Even though they aren't thinking about the country at all and just want to go to war. In addition, I was treated like a coward—I could still endure that but, *having an auntie as the saintess, there's just no way*~, they said—even though I myself was ashamed about itttt!」 (TN: Nai waa~)

It seemed there was an age limit for the saintess.

The ancestors inside the Jewel were also bewildered.

『The public's eye is cold after all.』

『Indeed. I also married late, so I can understand her feelings.』

『Well, from the knight order's perspective, their chance to raise achievement in war is taken away from them. These two are also at fault for their shoddy follow-up in regards to that.』

『Even so, they're still going to war even though their own country is in tatters. I'm amazed that no insurrection has ever come of it.』

『I guess that's the strong point of a theocracy?』

Was this a situation where it wouldn't be strange for the people to revolt if it was a normal country?

Gastone-san spoke.

「In the end, our positions were taken away due to the knight order's revolt. If I knew it would have become like this, I would have make Thelma-sama retire early.」

An adult woman was hugging her knees with a faraway look.

It made me sad seeing that.

「And so you two plan to run away to a faraway country from Beim?」

「Yes. At the very least I wish to let Thelma-sama escape even if only by herself, in order to let her live a happy life of ordinary people.」

Gastone-san said that it was his duty as the one who made her life fall into disorder.

Miranda looked at me.

「Now that we have heard the situation, what are you going to do now, Lyle?」

First we would need to investigate whether their story was really true or not.

But, when I consolidated the information that I heard from Miranda and Eva, the possibility was small that they were lying.

How were we going to get involved with Zayin that was in chaos right now?

Even I didn't really know how.

「First, I'll think it over after we get back.」

I said that and the talk was over.

.

Late at night.

I went inside the Jewel.

My consciousness was pulled in by the ancestors while I was sleeping.

「Is there something?」

『There isn't anything right now. But there will be from here on. No, should I say that you're the one who will cause something?』

When I saw the Sixth looked like he was having fun, I was exasperated thinking that he was scheming something bad again.

I sat down on my own chair.

I looked back once at my own memory door behind me, but there wasn't any change on it.

The Third talked to me and the strategy meeting regarding the future began.

『First let's summarize the situation. Zayin Theocracy—the saintess who is the leader of the country met a revolt by the knight order and escaped to another country.』

「Eh? But based on what we heard, the other side also has their own reasoning, don't they? The saint's tenure is too long or something.」

Though certainly I thought they were overdoing it with chasing out the saintess just because they wanted to go to war.

However the opinions of the ancestors were different.

『Lyle—in this situation the other side's circumstance doesn't matter. What's important is the just cause for our side. A wonderful saintess who stopped the war in order to let the people live in prosperity was chased out of the country. What a tragedy this is!』

The ancestors were nodding at the Seventh's fake-sounding speech. They were making wicked faces.

I immediately realized.

—Ah, these guys were eager.

「In other words, we're going to fight the knight order—or rather, the new saintess of that country isn't it?」

The Fourth nodded with a smile.

『So you also get it Lyle.』

「No, if we do that then Thelma-san and Gastone-san will also get dragged into it again. Is it alright for us to do something like that? Because, it looks like they don't want to get involved with this anymore.」

Those two looked like they were already tired with such a struggle.

The Fifth objected to my opinion.

『Lyle, you're underestimating the people in authority.』

「Eh?」

『Their lives are targeted even after their position has been taken away because the people in authority have guilty conscience. From the perspective of those who want to seal those two's mouth, their wish to escape to another country to live quietly doesn't matter. They will send people like that masked man one after another.』

What was waiting for Thelma-san was a life in fear of assassination.

That was too pitiful.

「—Can't we do something? Perhaps we can make it so it looks like they've died?」

『Do you know what will happen if you do that? They're going to investigate it thoroughly. If they learn from that investigation that those two have someone helping them, they will come to kill you and the people around you thinking that you might have heard something from those two. Understand this, you are already involved in this matter.』

I had to fight against the country called Zayin because I'm already involved.

「Is it just as I thought, that Zayin is behind this?」

The Sixth folded his arms with a troubled look. It seemed he also wasn't sure.

『We don't know. But, there's no doubt that those in Zayin will want to deal with the two of them. But, although this matter is certainly important, the real problem is—the war with Zayin!』

The ancestors were looking happy.

They looked really happy, even their eyes were sparkling.

『We have Thelma-chan as our just cause, and we also have Gastone, the high priest who must be very knowledgeable about Zayin's internal conditions. This is a big chance!』

But we would be in danger too because we had the two of them with us. Did you understand that, Third?

『If we use those two as our flag, Lyle's name will spread far and wide without a doubt when war breaks out!』

I had considered joining a war to increase my reputation, but I never thought about causing a war myself to increase my reputation, you know, Fourth.

『Just cause is really important, after all. Furthermore, our just cause is the saintess who is loved by the people. A warm welcome is going to be waiting for us.』

You looked really happy that an excuse to start a war fell into our lap, huh, Fifth.

『We're going to snatch Zayin! No, that's not it. We're going to return Zayin to those two!』

I'm amazed you were able to declare we were going to snatch Zayin, Sixth.

『If their story is true, then Zayin has saved up a lot of their strength until now. This is truly a delicious opportunity! If we win in this war, we'll be able to obtain that Zayin!』

What to do—it felt like we were actually the villains here, Seventh.

The ancestors were planning to snatch Zayin up by making use of Thelma-san and Gastone-san.

You villains.

「Are we, really going to do that? I don't know—it makes me feel bad.」

After hearing my opinion, the faces of the ancestors turned serious.

『Lyle—look here, are you going to get cold feet just with this even though you want to defeat Celes? Is your oath that you're going to defeat Celes a lie?』

I was at a loss against the Third's question.

I never expected this kind of development.

「N-no, but」

『There is no time. We need to hurry in order to defeat Celes. Besides, it's a fact that Zelma and Gastone were driven out of their country. Even their lives are being targeted. Can you allow that?』

I was almost convinced by the Fourth's persuasion.

But, was it alright for me to snatch the country?

The Fifth criticized my naivety.

『You've been a villain since the moment you decided to take on a country. Don't lose your nerve from just this much. Besides, this kind of chance might never come again.』

The Sixth nodded.

『This is truly a fortune! No, the person who can make use of this chance is fortune himself. Do you understand Lyle? —What is called luck is something that you grasp by yourself!』

The Seventh also had the same opinion.

『There is only a paper thin difference between a crisis and a chance. Lyle, if you can get through this then you will have taken a large step toward your objective. Won't that save a lot of people then?』

「That's right… —I understand, I'll do it.」

I wasn't a good person or the like since the day I decided to defeat Celes.

Then, I had to grasp this chance no matter what.

The Third became all smile but—

『Now you're talking! But, you see. There is a very big problem.』

「Very big problem?」

『Yep.』

—His smile vanished into a grave looking face.

『We—or rather you, Lyle. You aren't a feudal lord. You don't have manpower and supplies, right? In addition the biggest problem is—insufficient money.』

I almost fell from the chair hearing that.

「The problem is money!?」

The Fourth got angry from my remark.

I shrank back from that wrath.

『You mustn't underestimate this problem!』

「Y-yes.」

『Listen carefully Lyle. In the first place it also takes money to do war. You're earning a lot of money as an adventurer, but at best you can only hire dozens of people with that kind of money. You won't be able to win a war with just that, no matter what.』

It took money in order to war.

There were people who would happily go into such costly wars because they would be able to profit from pillaging the defeated country.

What an unpleasant story.

The people who were under the threat of such pillaging would need to fight in order to survive. It was an endless chain of negativity.

The Seventh sighed.

『As expected we need a patron. We have to start searching for one seriously.』

The Sixth was looking at me in the midst of that.

「What's the matter?」

His atmosphere was different from usual.

『Hm? Well, I've various thoughts in my mind. More importantly, Lyle. I'll teach you how to play with woman when we return to Beim!』

「Eh? Y-you don't need to do that.」

『Idiot! You need to experience playing around. It'll be hard for you if you don't learn how to treat women. First we're going to the brothel. The cheap place is no good. We're going to an expensive place!』

When I saw the Sixth looking excited like this, as expected it felt that he was just like usual.

.

—Beim's harbor.

A large ship was unloading its cargo in the harbor.

The one watching the work's progress was a girl with black hair that was tied up at both sides, Vera Tres(ヴェラ・トレース).

She was holding a parasol that was protecting her from sunlight while talking to her father, Fidel Tres(フィデル・トレース) about her result this time.

「Vera~, it looks like the business this time went well too. Papa is really happy that you did well~」

Vera was exasperated seeing her father making a fawning voice in front of his daughter.

「Papa is exaggerating just because I returned a bit late.」

Fidel bit his handkerchief hearing those words.

「A bit!? Do you know how worried papa was about Vera during that time!? Papa was so worried that I couldn't sleep at all.」

It seemed he was telling the truth. Fidel right now looked a bit thinner than before.

Vera thanked her father for worrying about her.

「Get a proper rest. It'll be awful if papa collapses. But, thank you for worrying about me.」

Fidel showed a wide smile and hugged Vera tightly.

「I love you, Veraaaa!」

「It's stuffy!」

A man and a woman came while Vera was trying to tear off Fidel from herself.

The woman was vera's little sister Gina Tres(ジーナ・トレース).

Unlike Vera with her determined atmosphere, she had a gentle and graceful atmosphere.

Beside her was—the young man who presented Vera with her parasol, Roland(ロランド).

He was an agreeable youth with short hair and a diligent atmosphere.

He had experience working under Vera before as a sailor, but currently he was Gina's attendant.

Gina talked to Vera.

「Nee-san, welcome back.」

「I'm back, Gina. You look well.」

When Vera looked at Roland, he bowed deeply toward her.

Vera felt lonely seeing that, but she showed a smile.

「Roland too, you look good with that attire.」

「Thank you very much, Vera-ojousama.」

He was wearing a shirt and a vest on top of it without the suit.

There was a man who was glaring at that Roland.

—It was Fidel.

「Hmph! Papa won't recognize a brat like this to take care of Gina's everyday necessities.」

Roland was an agreeable youth and a hard worker, but he had low social status.

There was no nobility system at Beim, but even so there was difference in status between the poor and the rich.

Roland was diligent and kind even though he was poor. Even Fidel evaluated him highly.

However, it was a different story when it came to being his daughter's husband.

Gina glared at Fidel.

「Papa, why won't you recognize him?」

Fidel winced from Gina's gaze, but it seemed that he thought this was for his daughter's sake and shook his head. His face became serious.

「This is for your sake. Roland is a hard worker, but he lacks a lot of things to become your husband. Understand this, Gina.」

Gina averted her gaze.

「Let's go, Roland.」

「Y-yes! Then, please excuse us.」

Roland bowed his head deeply and chased after Gina who walked ahead in a hurry.

Vera watched his back while trying to persuade Fidel.

「If papa doesn't plan to use Gina for a political marriage, then Roland should be fine, right?」

Fidel never considered marrying his daughters for political reasons, which was rare for a big merchant like him.

His cute daughters were the only thing that he wouldn't use for the sake of business.

「Vera, even papa wants Gina to become happy. But, do you think that brat can make her happy?」

「He's an earnest and hard worker isn't he?」

「It's not enough with just that. Listen well Vera. What's important is results. I appreciate the way Roland works, but I don't want to marry Gina to someone who can't produce results. Do you understand this feeling?」

「I can't understand at all.」

「Even Vera is going to make papa troubled!?」

Fidel broke down crying. He made even the other people around feel at a complete loss.

「Haa, more importantly there's still the next business. I want to talk about its preparation.」

「Eh!? How about you take your time to relax a bit more? Vera, you're working too hard.」

「—It’s fine. I want to work right now.」

Vera turned her gaze to where Roland and Gina had disappeared from view. She felt pathetic even if she said so herself.

(I’m really no good, to think I keep dragging this behind me like this.)

The men that she liked previously—Roland chose her sister over her. And then her little sister also accepted him.

She had no intention to complain about it, but right now she found it tiresome to stay at the mansion and face them.

Fidel turned serious when it became a talk of business.

「Hm, then give papa a little bit of time. Currently I think I’ll be able to obtain something that can sell well after a little bit more time. I also plan to replace the guards.」

「Did something happen?」

「It looks like the adventurer party that our company hired is going to do mercenary work. Wait a little bit more until I can plug that hole.」

「There’ll be war again? Papa—」

Fidel interrupted what Vera was going to say.

「I understand what you want to say, but this is a problem for the whole Beim. It’s not a problem that Tres family alone can do anything about. Now then, tell me about the information from the various places you visited. Was there anything strange?」

Fidel was also a major merchant that represented Beim. His expression was different when it came to a business talk.

His expression said that he didn’t have any intention of going easy even against his own daughter.

「Alright. The north is still the same as usual. But the south—」

The two started talking about work—.

.

I returned to our inn at Beim and prepared a room for Thelma-san and Gastone-san.

After a night passed since our return to Beim, I talked to the two of them about their plan going forward.

「Both of you, please rest here for a bit more.」

Gastone-san was bewildered.

「Is it really alright? We won’t be able to pay you back for all this though?」

They had lost most of their possessions in the middle of their escape, so they were nearly penniless right now.

「I don’t mind. If there’s anything that both of you need, we will buy it for you. Though there’s also the risk of assassination, so the two of you will need to stay cooped up here for the time being.」

「B-but, there’s no way we can keep burdening all of you like this.」

「It’s not a problem. Rather than that, please think carefully in regards to that matter. It’ll also be for the sake of both of you.」

Gastone-san looked at Thelma-san.

Thelma-san was depressed.

I had brought up the talk about taking back Zayin to the two of them.

「I'm fine with it, but Thelma-sama is already…」

It seemed Gastone-san was fine with it, but the problem was Thelma-san.

「—If Zayin will send pursuers no matter where we run to, then it'll be the same even if we run to a faraway foreign country. We'll have to keep living in fear of assassination. But! But, I won't return to being a saintess anymore. I'm tired already.」

Gastone-san's shoulders slumped down.

「Thelma-sama.」

Thelma-san was completely exhausted and rejected my proposition.

But, the ancestors wouldn't allow me to let her go.

Thelma-san was a necessary person for the sake of pillaging—wrong, recapturing Zayin.

She was absolutely necessary.

It looked like it would take some more time until Thelma-san recovered her motivation again.

Gastone-san apologized to me.

「Forgive me, but I can't cooperate with Thelma-sama in this state. I alone will not be useful. We're also in a situation where assassins are sent to kill us, so it's fine even if you don't force yourself to shelter us. It will bring danger to you and your friends too.」

I couldn't let them go, and it would be easier to protect them too if they were nearby.

「We're already involved. We can only fight in order to overcome this situation.」

「—My apologies. I'll try to persuade Thelma-sama too.」

I was also concerned by that masked man.

A troublesome bunch was on the move, but I wouldn't be able to fight Celes if I couldn't overcome something of this level.

「—Please rest well for now.」

I left the room, then I heard the Sixth clicking his tongue.

『Thelma has turned timid huh. But, it will still take time until our preparations are ready. We just need to make her motivated before that.』

I talked to the Sixth with a small voice.

「She said that she don't want to do it though?」

『It's fine even if she just acts as a figurehead in the end. But, in her current state it's possible that she might even take her own life. We need to let her take a break for a while.』

Thelma-san was completely exhausted.

She was a necessary person in order to snatch Zayin. We would have to protect her for a while.

It would be difficult to protect those two from assassins, but they had that much worth.

I had to protect them to the end.

『But putting that aside, Lyle—you're prepared aren't you?』

「Y-yes. But, are we really going?」

『Obviously! Everyone is tired and resting right now. This is our chance! We're just going to secretly go out to play and then return.』

The Sixth kept annoying me to go to a brothel.

『You have obtained the necessary information from Creit! What's left is only to march forward!』

Creit was knowledgeable—too knowledgeable, even, about brothels. I already asked him about the establishment that he recommended.

I had also heard from him about the required money and also the manners for such a place.

What was left was to go to the place and play.

「Is this really alright?」

『You idiot! Can you lead those women and fight when you yourself don't know anything about women? Lyle, this is a trial! If you learn how to handle a woman, you'll be able to handle women more smoothly in the future!』

Was that really true?

B-but—to be honest I was interested.

「I-if Sixth is saying that much then it can't be helped then~」

『That's right. It can't be helped after I'm saying this much to you. Lyle, this is your trial!』

I deliberately let myself get cajoled by Sixth and decided to head to the brothel.

Then, I saw several women lying in wait on my way.

「—Eh?」

Over there were my companions.

「Lyle, where are you planning to go, I wonder?」

Miranda was smiling.

「No, that, I」

Miranda approached me and cornered me until the wall—she placed her hand on the wall beside my face.

「I've heard. You kissed Sophia, didn't you?」

S-so this is about that!

I turned just my gaze toward Sophia. There she was pressing her hands on her blushing cheeks.

She looked really embarrassed but, please wait a second.

Could it be she talked to the others!?

「T-that was not counted.」

「Why?」

「T-that was something ceremonial to use Arts—」

Miranda's face turned smiling when I started making excuse.

「I see.」

「You understand?」

「I understand. In other words, it's also necessary for us to experience it too, don't you think so?」

「—Eh?」

Novem was slightly angry at my surprised self. It was cute.

「We've heard about the circumstance from Sophia-san. Lyle-sama, please mention it if it's necessary to train in its usage beforehand to some degree.」

Aria was averting her face from me, but she kept sending glances at my way.

「M-me too, if training is really necessary, theen~, perhaps it can't be helped.」

Just what in the world was going on?

Monica was in high spirits.

「Just remember that chicken dickwad's first kiss is already mine! You fleshbag women can just bite your finger in frustration!」

Why were you provoking everyone?

I looked toward Eva and Clara who weren't showing any interest.

But, the two of them were deep in talk with each other and wouldn't look over here.

「Becoming stronger from kissing—don't you think that it's an interesting setting?」

「I'm interested in the setting, but does it really need to be a kiss? I'm suspicious that there might be another method.」

The two of them were talking with each other about my Arts. They were getting excited, unlike their usual quarrel.

May was yawning. She didn't seem interested.

「Humans are really strange to be this fixated with kissing. It's just one way of expressing love right?」

That wasn't wrong, but was I mistaken for wanting to feel the gracefulness from not expressing love so indiscreetly?

Also, Sophia's face was bright red.

Miranda brought her face close to mine.

「If it's just a ceremony then it's alright to not mind it so much, right?」

「I-I think it's better to treat kissing more importantly.」

I was trembling, then Miranda whispered into my ear.

「Putting that aside, were you planning to go playing somewhere outside today? Perhaps, somewhere like a brothel?」

The Sixth was shocked.

『How does she know!? Lyle should have been more careful!』

T-that's right. I was preparing for this carefully so that everyone wouldn't realize.

I never expected that it would be exposed.

Miranda blew air into my ear.

My body twitched in a shiver. Miranda gave me a warning while looking like she enjoyed my reaction.

「It's improper to go to a brothel while you have us you know, Lyle.」

「Hih!」

A strangled scream slipped out from my throat. I looked at Miranda's face while trembling something fierce.

Then Miranda made a face that said 「As I thought」.

「I was just asking a leading question to make sure but, it looks like my guess is right. I'm really sad, Lyle—even though I want you to choose me as your first time.」

Everyone's gazes toward me abruptly turned cold.

The voices of the ancestors from inside the Jewel were also trembling a little.

『Eh, what's this? Miranda-chan looks scary you know.』

『—It's troubling because you didn't learn how to deal with this kind of situation.』

『How did she find out?』

『I'm feeling a similar atmosphere like my wives from Miranda. She is smiling but, she is absolutely angry right now!』

『Everybody can see that. However, this is troubling. You're in danger, Lyle.』

Please don't speak like this is someone else's problem. Why wouldn't you guys help me?

The Seventh was exasperated with me.

『It's your fault for getting taken in by the Sixth's smooth talk.』

—I couldn't say anything back.

Miranda started talking with a bewitching tone.

「I'm troubled that Lyle won't choose me though~. I'll feel jealous of the prostitute that Lyle will embrace.」

「N-now now, Miranda! I'm not going to a place like a brothel you know!」

「Really?」

「Y-yeah.」

「Lyle, answer me while looking into my eyes. You're speaking the truth right? If you're lying—」

Miranda was scary. And then the eyes of my companions around me—were also somewhat scary.

Shannon came out of her room with her hand rubbing her eyes sleepily while I was trembling.

She was wearing pajamas and hugging her pillow.

「Everyone good morning~」

Was this girl sleeping until now, even though it was almost noon?

How nice it was to be her.

That Shannon looked at me, and tilted her head—and then she started to laugh.

「What? Geeze, Lyle, what did you do? You're really stupid. I wonder just what did you do that make everyone so angry?」

She approached me happily.

「Onee-sama, what did Lyle do?」

Miranda averted her face from Shannon who asked her innocently.

It looked like she couldn't tell her young little sister that she was warning me for trying to go to a brothel.

「Shannon, go change your clothes first.」

「Eh? Why won't you tell me? —Aria, tell me, hey!」

This time she asked Aria. Aria averted her face and returned to her room.

「Ah, that's right! I need to maintain my tools today!」

She made a forced excuse to retreat. Sophia also followed her.

「M-me too!」

As for Eva and Clara, they were already gone even before this.

「Monica, tell me what happened with Lyle?」

「This matter cannot be taught to someone under eighteen years old. Ask me again after you become an adult, desu!」

Even Monica had common sense? However, why eighteen years old?

Shannon became obstinate and asked May this time.

「May!」

May was going to tell her indifferently.

「Actually Lyle was going to play—nnguh!」

Novem blocked May's mouth from behind. She dragged May away with a smile.

「Looks like you still need to learn a bit more about some common sense. Come study with me.」

After Novem and others were gone, Shannon looked at me and puffed her cheeks.

「Everyone is making fun of me. If it's like this then I'll investigate it at any cost! Lyle, you better prepare yourself!」

Shannon declared that she would monitor me for the whole day. Miranda was exasperated and moved away from me.

She whispered into my ear while doing so.

「Lyle, I'm fine with you playing around but—I won't forgive you if you become serious with another woman.」

A chill rushed through my back. I furiously nodded many times, then Miranda led Shannon away.

「Now then, we're going too Shannon.」

「Onee-sama, please tell me. What did Lyle do!?」

「He still hasn't done anything. But he might do so in the future, so Shannon too, keep a careful watch on him okay?」

Shannon smiled and nodded.

「Leave it to me! —Prepare yourself Lyle.」

After the two entered their room, there was only Monica remaining here. Monica twisted her body shyly.

「Geez, chicken dickwad you pervert! But, I also love chicken dickwad who is like that. If it's like this, this Monica will teach you about health and physical education in great detail.」

「What's this health and physical education?」

I sighed.

「—Looks like it will be a disaster if I go out playing woman.」

The Sixth also had the same opinion as me.

『—Yeah. Even so, Miranda's instinct is really sharp.』

I couldn’t hear the voice of the other ancestors inside the Jewel.

It couldn’t be helped because my honorable ancestors were completely useless in this kind of subject.

I was actually looking forward to it a little, but my companions were too scary. I couldn’t go out playing so I meekly returned to my own room.

To be continued to Sevens 10

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